Pygmalion

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Pygmalion

by peppermintquartz

Summary

"I feel unstable," Will finally admitted. His face burned with shame, though he knew there was no call to be ashamed.
"That's why you kissed her," said Hannibal. "A clutch for balance."

Notes

From the scene after Alana and Will kissed, and Will turning up at Hannibal's home. Hannibal changes his plans when he realizes this would be the perfect opening to make Will completely his.

Chapter 1

"I feel unstable," Will finally admitted. His face burned with shame, though he knew there was no call to be ashamed.

"That's why you kissed her," said Hannibal. "A clutch for balance."

The psychiatrist studied Will Graham for a few heartbeats. The younger man was obviously distressed; he had just driven over an hour in the snow to come to Hannibal, to tell him of this occurrence. Something that could be said over the phone or in their next session, and yet Will could not wait, could not keep it in his heart - he had to come all the way and let himself into Hannibal's home, using the keys Hannibal gave him before.

Tobias escaped because of this interruption, but the doctor thought Will, here, was worth the added hassle of hunting the other murderer down. A miasma of confusion and rejection radiated from Will, but within it there was, oddly enough, *hope*.

Hannibal considered his original plans for Will, and quietly discarded them as he put down his dessert fork. Where there was hope, there was a chance, and he considered himself an opportunist. "Will?"

"Dr Lecter." Will's gaze skittered over Hannibal's chest, shoulders, jaw, before looking away to stare at the dessert Hannibal gave him. "I'm sorry. I don't know what I'm doing."

The older man drew close. For a second he was overwhelmed by the fevered sweetness pouring from Will's skin, like peaches ready to burst at a touch. The heat of his skin was nearly palpable - Will was burning up, and it would have been so glorious to watch him dissolve into his madness. Yet, a Will that was entirely his was far more tempting.

"You've come all this way to tell me this... incident. I think your subconscious mind knows what it is doing."

Will breathed out a short laugh. "Yeah? It's not telling *me* anything."

"Shall I guess then?"

At the softness of Hannibal's tone, Will finally looked up at the doctor. He seemed startled that Hannibal was standing so near. "I-I suppose you should. You know my mind better than... better than anyone."

Hannibal allowed a small smile. "You kissed Alana as a clutch for balance. I think you came here to tell me this also as a clutch for balance." His voice dropped to a low whisper, making his accent more pronounced. "I am, after all, meant to be your stability."

"Are you?" Will murmured, his blue eyes wide and wounded. "Are you really?"

Will was afraid, Hannibal realized. Afraid to be rejected twice in one night, to be left floundering. Lost. The older man raised a hand and brushed the tips of his fingers along Will's jaw, light and gentle and far too intrusive. The touch lingered near the chin.

"I wish to be," said Hannibal. He swallowed, as though this was a difficult admission. "I wish to be the mooring point of your life, where you can feel safe amidst the turbulence of your imagination. When the storms of death and murder threaten to swamp you, I wish you can find with me safe harbor."

Then the doctor swallowed again, dropping his hand, and stepped back, just one pace. He turned away and busied himself with folding a nearby dish towel, every motion harried and unlike himself.

"I cannot in good conscience let you drive home through the snow, not at this hour," Hannibal said quickly. "If you'll wait here, I will prepare the guest room-"

"Hannibal."

The name was softly spoken, but the doctor froze in place as though shell-shocked. His left hand clenched and relaxed, releasing the dish towel, and he took two breaths before turning around to face Will Graham.

The FBI profiler was biting on his lower lip. A flush spread over his cheekbones and colored the tops of his ears, making him look much younger than he was.

"Will?" Hannibal slid his right hand along the counter until it was very close to the younger man's elbow.

The silvery thrill that raced up Hannibal's arm and through his veins when Will leaned into the touch was unexpected but not unwelcome. Hannibal opened his hand and grasped Will's arm, just below the elbow.

Will licked his lips, and shifted closer, the distance between the two shrinking inch by inch, every move one of Will's own volition. His lips parted and again he whispered, "Hannibal."

The scent of encephalitis crept into Hannibal's nose and filled his lungs. it was fitting, Hannibal thought, that he should be suffused with Will's essence. He had been infected with thoughts of this strange, wary man, this wild creature of shadow and heart, from the very first moment when they met. He's been trying to invade Will in the same way ever since.

Hannibal leaned forward and his mouth brushed the younger man's overly-warm cheek. It had the texture of damp silk, and again Hannibal was reminded strongly of peaches. Would Will's flesh be as sweet? He was brought out of his musings when Will touched his left shoulder, tentative and shy, as though prepared to be brushed off any moment. Hannibal moved his head and brought his mouth to Will's.

Their lips touched, just the merest hint of contact. Will's sharp intake of breath made something uncoil inside Hannibal and the older man tightened his grip on Will, his right hand going to Will's jaw to keep him there.

"Hannibal... are you my doctor?" asked Will, his voice rough and melodious in its rawness.

"We were just having conversations," Hannibal murmured, every syllable bringing their lips to brush together.

"So this... what this is - it won't-"

"No. No it won't."

The reassurance worked. Will surged forward suddenly and claimed Hannibal's lips. His stubble scratched at the older man's skin, a delightful contrast to the soft, moist heat that was his mouth.

Hannibal tasted Will with his growing madness, and felt a surprising rush of desire for the younger man. He wrapped his strong arms around him, one hand up the lean muscled back, cradling his neck, fingers twined into dark brown curls - how easy to kill him right now! - and the other pulling Will closer, impossibly closer.

A soft moan dragged its way out of Will's throat when Hannibal moved his lips down Will's neck. The sound made Hannibal *hunger* for something more, but he fought the craving. Not yet. Patience was a virtue, after all.

"Stay the night," the doctor ordered, his voice made gravelly with emotion.

Will bit his lips again and nodded, just once. He curled his fingers into Hannibal's jacket and then slipped his hands inside to feel Hannibal's chest, tug at the tie.

"I'm not dreaming, am I?" asked the profiler, breathless.

Hannibal skated his mouth up the bare neck and nipped playfully at an earlobe. "You are awake, my sweet Will. If anything, this would be *my* dream."

The endearment made Will giggle. He tucked his head against Hannibal's neck and Hannibal buried his nose in wild curls. Tension bled out of Will's frame second by second. A relaxed Will Graham was wholly out of Hannibal's frame of reference and he did not quite know what to do.

Once again, Will Graham has surprised him. He had not anticipated this willing surrender.

"I want... I don't know what I want. I mean, I do, but... This is not- This is new." Will tightened his grip on Hannibal's tie and shifted; his breath was warmer than it should be against Hannibal's skin.

"In what sense?" Hannibal asked. His fingers curl into the younger man's hair, fascinated by the way the strands wrapped and clung to his digits. Perhaps he should call Donald and arrange an appointment.

"Not physically," said Will quickly. "But... You-you wanting to be my mooring. No one - Every one wants me to sail out and hunt the monster and bring it back; they want to hear how I caught it. No one's ever really offered to be... to want to be-"

"A safe harbor for you?" Hannibal presses a kiss to Will's cheek, and the corner of his mouth. "Other people want too much from you. I have no desire other than for you to have a place to rest and be calm."

Will pulled back and swept Hannibal's fringe from his face. His gaze was inscrutable, but he wore a small, sad smile. "That's what they used to say."

"I am not them." Hannibal took Will's hand and rested his cheek against the warm palm.

"No," said Will, his hand sliding to cup Hannibal's jaw, "you are something else entirely."

They kissed again, slow now, and deliberate. Hannibal cataloged every sensation, filing them away to savor in private later. Though he was a fairly reserved man, Will was quite vocal in his enjoyment, soft moans slipping from his lips like pearls into wine.

By the time they drew apart, Will was panting slightly. He touched Hannibal's lower lip, pulled on it lightly; the smile on Will's face was less pensive.

"I don't know what I want from this. I don't know what you want from this," he said quietly. "And... and Jack will definitely be pissed if he finds out. When he finds out."

Hannibal captured Will's hand and kissed his touching fingers. He wants to nibble on them, lick honey or blood from them. "I doubt Alana will be pleased about this either."

On hearing the woman's name, Will groaned and rested his face against Hannibal's neck. "She's going to think this is her fault. Or yours."

"This isn't anyone's fault," said Hannibal. "It's not a mistake."

"Isn't it?" Will sighed and stepped back, though he relinquished his touch reluctantly; his right hand caught Hannibal's fingers, and he stared at them as he said, "I don't think this will end well, for either of us, if we let it continue."

"Then we don't let it end," said Hannibal simply. He squeezed Will's fingers. "But that is a discussion for another time. You need to rest."

"A guest room, for tonight."

"Yes." Hannibal gave him a chaste kiss. A careful courtship to bind Will close would take great skill. He smiled and inclined his head. "Eat your dessert. I will get the room ready."

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal walked past the guest room silently, resisting the urge to peek again. Will had slept soundly, if restively, without the nightmares he had mentioned the night before.

In the kitchen, Hannibal debated over what to do with the Tobias Budge situation. He wanted that man out of the equation as soon as possible, and judging from last night's confrontation, Budge was equally ready to kill Hannibal for turning down the courtship. It would take some fine control to have Budge killed by some other hand.

If Will went to him... Hannibal mused over the possibilities. Will would bring backup - the man was not stupid - and Budge would certainly attack those investigating him. There was a chance that they would capture Budge alive, and that was a risk Hannibal wasn't certain he wished to take, On the other hand, the police would likely shoot to kill; after all, Budge was black and armed, which made him a deadly threat in the eyes of the local police. However, Hannibal did not want Will to be in the line of fire. Was there another way for Tobias Budge to be eliminated by the police without involving Will?

Absently starting the coffee-maker, Hannibal thought about Will's encephalitis and wondered how much it was beginning to impair him. Perhaps he doubted Will too much. The man was capable and had been a police officer prior to his teaching stint in the FBI. Hannibal got the eggs and bacon ready. *If Will went to him...*

*****

Will woke up in an unfamiliar bed and, for a few heartbeats, felt the stirrings of panic beneath his diaphragm. The bed was too soft, the covers too smooth, and there were no dogs around.

Then the events of the previous night caught up with his mind.

"Oh my god," he breathed out. "Oh my God. I kissed him."

He covered his face and eyes, trying - and failing - to force down the embarrassed pleasure that clawed from inside him. He remembered the kisses, vividly, the way Hannibal's hand cupped his jaw, the scent of herbs and meat (from cooking, no doubt) and expensive cologne. The feel of Hannibal's mouth and tongue, the wash of his breath over Will's heated skin.

If Jack found out - no, *when* Jack found out, the shit would hit the fan. Hannibal might think it wouldn't matter, but Jack would take on that annoyingly paternal role and make it Hannibal's fault.

And Alana. Good god, Alana. He had kissed Alana, and then came to Hannibal's home and *kissed Hannibal*. Alana would either blame herself for Will throwing himself at Hannibal, or

blame Hannibal for not stopping Will from making his move. And beneath all that, she would blame Will for turning to his psychiatrist instead of persevering with her.

The smell of bacon drifted into the room and Will's stomach growled. It smelled *heavenly*. He sat up, struggling a little with the sheets - seriously, what thread-count were these? - and stretched. For the first time in many months, he felt rested. Was this what a good mattress was capable of?

Hannibal's guest bathroom was designed like a high-end hotel's, all impersonal luxury. Will brushed his teeth quickly and rinsed his face. He stared at himself in the mirror, his gaze haunted and distant.

The sounds of wounded animals in the distance. The visions. The stag with the ink-black feathers. He scrubbed at his face, his stubble scratching under his palms and grounding him in the present. He ought to shave but he couldn't find a razor.

A quick glance at the bedside clock told him he had enough time for breakfast and a quick trip home to feed the dogs, let them out for a bit. His lectures today were around noon. Assuming he got to lecture and the throat cello maestro didn't come up with a new piece for whomever he was serenading.

*****

Hannibal had just finished plating the eggs. bacon, and tomatoes when Will crept into the kitchen, shy and unsure, smelling of Hannibal's grooming products. That deviation from Will's usual scent makes something uncurl with pride in the pit of Hannibal's gut.

"Good morning, Will," he said with a broad smile. "Excellent timing. Please, help yourself to the coffee. Breakfast is ready."

"Morning," said Will, holding back a yawn. He grinned bashfully. "You're a morning person. Figures." He took one of the plates and a cup of coffee. "A habit from the days at the emergency room?"

Hannibal led the way to the dining table where he set down the food. The sun was barely up. "I've never needed much sleep," he said. "Did you sleep well? I was going to let you sleep in, but I suspected you would wish to change into attire more suited for the lecture hall."

Will looked down at his shirt, as though he had forgotten what he was wearing. "Oh, yes. And feed the dogs, let them out for a bit."

"You don't have a neighbor to do that for you?"

"I don't like asking favors," said Will. He sipped the coffee and moaned in bliss. Every cell in his body seemed to warm up, and the scent alone made him curl his toes in pleasure. "Except perhaps to have this coffee every morning. And afternoon. And night. I'll replace my blood with this."

"Too much coffee is not good for you, Will." Hannibal chuckled, and added in a low voice, "I would love to provide you with this every morning, nonetheless."

With a start Will realized what he had said. He set the cup down and bit his lower lip. "I-I wasn't... I mean, um. I didn't mean that-"

"It's alright, Will," said Hannibal, reaching across to squeeze Will's hand lightly. "I was joking. Please, have your breakfast."

After a few mouthfuls, Will felt compelled to explain, "I do like this, Hannibal. I just don't... I don't think I'm good company for anyone in the long term."

"You believe you're unstable."

"I feel unstable. Even Alana said I'm unstable." Wincing, Will realized it was perhaps not the most tactful thing to say, bringing up the woman.

"And I've said that I am willing to be your stability, if you'll let me," the older man replied. He reached across again to grasp Will's hand, stroking his knuckles. "There is no rush, sweet Will. Just know that I am here for you. I will always be here for you."

"But why?" blurted Will. "I don't fit with you. Your life, your... social circles. I don't fit with all - with all *this*."

Hannibal cocked his head and studied Will, his eyes dark with inscrutable amusement. "Will, do you believe I am shaped by my surroundings? All this that you feel do not fit you can be discarded. I can live a life different to this, change my environment to suit us. As for you not fitting with me... I think you will find that statement to be untrue."

Will swallowed. He couldn't focus on much more than Hannibal's words and touch. What the doctor said was true: Hannibal wasn't shaped by his environment. Quite the opposite. The man sought to shape his environment, carve out a space for himself to inhabit. His office was an extension of him, as was this house; the music, the meals, the conversations. All Hannibal.

And Hannibal wanted him.

Did that mean Hannibal would shape Will too? Change him to fit?

Will wasn't sure he did not want that. The way he was was not good for him, not good for anyone. If he were to let Hannibal shape him, change him... But Will knew who he was. Always did.

He picked up his coffee and finished it in one long swallow. This was too much thinking for the morning, and he still had a long drive home and to work.

Perhaps sensing Will's emotional withdrawal, Hannibal took up his own coffee too. "What are your plans today, Will?"

"Lecture, grading. Maybe go down to the lab, see if they have anything new on the throat cello case."

Hannibal grew still. He set down his cup and licked his lips, his gaze flickering from his cup to Will's face. Finally he said, "I have my appointment book in the study. I'll need to take it with me to the office later. Please don't look at the marked page of notes, because a patient has mentioned something about this case."

At the odd injunction, Will frowned. He looked at Hannibal and saw the mute request, and then nodded. "Of course."

"You are done with your breakfast?" asked Hannibal, standing up. "I'll clear the plates."

Ordinarily Will would offer to help. This time, however, he remained seated. Just as Hannibal was about to go into the kitchen, Will asked, "Did I leave my cell in the study?"

"I believe so, yes," said Hannibal, and nodded at Will. His smile was brief.

*****

Once he was out of Hannibal's home. Will called Jack. "I have a lead on the Douglas Wilson case."

*****

Hannibal twitched the curtains aside and watched Will drive out of sight. They had kissed briefly at the door before Hannibal let him out, along with a promise of them dining together again sometime this week. He knew he was likely to see Will again later today, since he had an appointment with Franklyn to refer him to another psychiatrist. Will would want to talk to Franklyn, Hannibal was sure.

With Stravinsky playing in his head, Hannibal went into the study to retrieve the appointment book. He had set it out before frying the bacon, and Will certainly did not disappoint: the book was slightly askew and the ribbon marking the page not straightened the way Hannibal left it.

Much like the man himself, to impose chaos on Hannibal's ordered life.

Tobias Budge was going to die today. Hannibal allowed himself a faint sense of regret that he could not do it personally; Budge was young and strong, and would have given excellent meat. His lips curled with anticipation at the idea of Will pulling more guilt onto himself, an eiderdown of guilt and self-loathing for enjoying the killing of bad men. His large eyes, wounded and oh so very vulnerable, seeking reassurance; his very being reaching out for stability.

And Hannibal would be there, his safe harbor.

Pleased, Hannibal put away his appointment book and headed upstairs to change. Along the way, he went into the guest room to straighten the covers. He could not resist pressing the pillowcase to his face, breathing the infectious and intoxicating scent of Will Graham. He really should set up an appointment with Donald soon. Once Will came to him for one more kiss, one more embrace, Hannibal would broach the subject, and tie Will to him completely.

It was going to be a wonderful day.

Chapter End Notes

i did mention the race card. if i offended anyone, i apologize. i only meant to state the reality of matters in that an armed black man would more likely be perceived as a deadly threat than an armed white man.

Chapter 3

It was barely worth the effort of remaining polite while Franklyn sputtered impotently at him, but given it would be his final appointment, Hannibal did him the courtesy. The neurotic man was understandably upset by Hannibal's insistence on referring him to another, but before the doctor could elucidate his reasons once more, they were interrupted by Tobias Budge bursting into the office.

Rude, thought Hannibal, rising to his feet in one smooth unfolding. He saw the blood trailing from Budge's ear to his collar, staining it a lovely bright red - Hannibal thought about blood chocolate, it would be the perfect use of Budge if he could convince Franklyn to leave.

Until Budge spoke. "I just killed two men. The FBI came to question me about the murder."

Hannibal blinked. *Will?*

"...You can get back up in the air again. There is rehabilitation for everyone," said Franklyn, trying to recycle what he had gleaned from his eight other psychiatrists. Budge looked like he was about to squash Franklyn under his shoe like a bug.

Hannibal stepped forward, watching Budge's hands. "Franklyn, I want you to leave now."

"Stay right where you are, Franklyn."

The pudgy man nattered on, trying to talk Budge down. Hannibal tuned him out, his mind working through the dozens of possible scenarios that had led to Will challenging Budge with so little backup. He was, to his own mild surprise, incandescent with rage.

"You're probably scared. Probably feel like you're all alone," said Franklyn, indicating once again that had his money not been secured by a very well-designed trust fund he would have been swindled out of every cent a long time ago.

Tobias Budge looked past Franklyn. He bore himself tall and proud as a prince. "I'm not alone."

"That's right, you're not alone!" The relief in Franklyn's tone was nearly painful in its excess. "Nothing has happened in our friendship that you and I can't recover from-"

Hannibal had heard enough. With two quick steps forward, he grabbed Franklyn and twisted his neck. The crack served to focus the doctor; he let the body drop unceremoniously, his gaze fixed on Budge.

"I was looking forward to that," said Budge, sounding offended.

"I know," replied Hannibal.

*****

Will felt nauseated all the way from Chordophone to Hannibal's office. He had to stay with the bodies; it was a crime scene, after all, and with the report ringing in his ears he was all but useless in trying to stay upright. It would have been impossible for him to try to take down the other man. He only hoped Tobias Budge was similarly impaired; he had no idea where the man would run off to. His call to dispatch had been as detailed as he could make it even as he fought the urge to throw up.

Jack had listened to his second phone call and come personally to pick him up, leaving the forensics to sort out the basement and its grisly workshop. They were on the way to Wolf Trap when Jack got a call about Budge found dead in Hannibal Lecter's office, along with another man named Froideveaux. Jack had the phone on speaker.

I know that name, Will thought. He had seen it in Hannibal's notes, the one he told Will to Not Read, with the implicit understanding of Will reading it. *Franklyn Froideveaux who made friends with a serial killer.*

"Is Hannibal okay?" asked Will, and only just realized his mistake after the name slipped from his lips.

Jack shot him a curious look. "I don't know. He's alive, that much we know. And since when did you start calling him Hannibal?"

Since the time we kissed. Like last night. And it felt so good, like I can go around in pitch darkness for all my days knowing that I just have to look at him and see the light. Like I can sail out in the worst storms and sink into death and despair and human psychopathy but not be afraid of drowning.

He said, "Very recently. He's not really my doctor, anyway."

"No he's not." Jack made the turn down to Chandler Square. Already they could see squad cars and forensics ready.

Will knew Jack liked that he and Hannibal were not in an official doctor-patient relationship. This gave Jack reason to ask after Will, get a gauge of his mental stability. He doubted that Jack would like to know he and Hannibal were starting to navigate a far closer relationship - they had yet to discuss it - and that Will *wanted* this.

He felt better, anyway. The ringing in his ears had passed, and the nausea was manageable now. leaving Jack to interrogate one of the officers, he strode up the familiar flight of steps, and then paused outside in the waiting room. What if Hannibal blamed him for this? What if Hannibal thought Will and all that Will dragged with him were too much of a bother?

What if Hannibal didn't want him after all this?

He hesitated long enough for Jack to catch up. The burly man cast Will another curious glance but said nothing, striding into the office as though he owned it. Will inhaled deeply, sensing a faint cry of distress on the edge of hearing, and then walked into the room, eyes downcast.

*****

Hannibal was considering sauteing Jack's brains when the man himself arrived, walking slow and deliberate, taking in the disarray in the room and reading the scene. The doctor was about to speak when his breath caught.

Will Graham came in, nervousness and worry radiating from every pore.

The relief that slammed into Hannibal was nothing short of blinding. He blinked, a few times, and by then Will had come to lean at his desk. Close enough that Hannibal could smell him and know that this was not a mirage.

"I was worried you were dead," whispered Hannibal, the words escaping him. He could not look away from Will: bloodied hand, hair in disarray, pale - shock or from his illness? - and skittish. "Mr. Budge said he was questioned by the FBI and he murdered two men. I was so afraid."

The younger man reached out and rubbed his thumb over the cut on Hannibal's cheek. Then he tucked his hands in his lap, his gaze falling on his clasped hands.

"I'm sorry," he managed, his voice tight. Had Hannibal ever admitted to fear? Casting his mind back, Will could not find an instance when the older man did not appear to be confident and fearless. Will's mouth curved into a wobbly smile.

Before he could say more, Jack came to them. "Tobias Budge killed two police officers and came straight to your office."

"He barged in during Franklyn's appointment." Hannibal swallowed and licked his lips. "He said... He said he had been looking forward to killing him."

"He killed Franklyn."

"And then he attacked me."

"And you killed him."

"Yes," said Hannibal, his eyes closing briefly. "Yes, I did."

Will angled himself to subtly shield Hannibal from Jack's persistence. "Was Mr Froideveaux the person Budge was serenading?"

"I don't know," Hannibal said, his shoulders slumping slightly. He watched the medical examiners carry the body bags out of his office. "I thought... I thought it was simply an issue of poor choice in friends."

"It doesn't feel simple to me," said Jack.

For the first time since Will knew Hannibal, the older man looked tired and vulnerable. When Jack added, "We're going to need you to come in-"

"-Hannibal needs rest, Jack," Will interrupted quietly. "He's been through enough today. You still have the basement to sort out."

Once again Jack leveled Will that same curious stare, before he nodded and walked away.

Hannibal smiled faintly at Will before he inhaled and winced. "I've failed him."

"You weren't to know." Will risked reaching out a second time, this time a discreet brushing of his thumb over Hannibal's bleeding lip. Then he suddenly realized the intimacy of the gesture and pulled away again. "I feel like I have dragged you into my world."

Hannibal smiled at Will, his lip still tingling where the younger man had caressed it. "I got here on my own." He covered Will's hand with his own. "But I certainly appreciate the company."

*****

Will drove Hannibal home and helped him into his kitchen. In silence he watched the doctor sew up his wound. Hannibal's hands were steady despite it being his own flesh he was putting together. Will had to look away a few times, impressed and uneasy with this display of incredible self-control.

Stability and steadiness, with more than enough to spare.

"I would like to visit you over the next few days, if I'm not... smothering you."

"Your company will be very welcome, Will," said Hannibal, the lines around his eyes creasing with warm affection.

"I'm not going to stay, though." Will rubbed one elbow, trying to find the non-insulting way to say what he had to say. "I... don't know what we have between us. Not yet. And I don't want to lead you on. I still... I still feel something for Alana, and I need to deal with my feelings for her, before I can deal with my feelings for you."

"You need time."

Will nodded quickly. "Yes. And space. But I-" His throat felt constricted and his cheeks warm. "I want... I want to understand this... *this*. That we have."

Hannibal put away his tools; he would sterilize them later. For now he held out a hand, willing the younger man to come to him. When Will took his outstretched hand, Hannibal said, "I will never force you into anything you don't wish for, Will. That said, I would love to have you here for dinner as often as possible. Just send me a message whether you wish to come, and I will adjust my recipes as needed."

He looks divine when he blushes, Hannibal thought in admiration, as Will squeezed the psychiatrist's fingers in mute acknowledgment. Time to add in one more hook.

"I also think you need to see a specialist," said Hannibal carefully. "Your fever worries me, but more importantly there is a scent of illness around you."

"A-a scent of illness?"

"A sweetness and a heat. I was made aware of that last night, when we kissed. I smelled it under the aftershave and Alana's perfume. I wouldn't have thought more of it because I assume my judgment then was skewed," said Hannibal, now drawing Will's hand close to his nose and inhaling along the fine bones along the back until the wrist. He turned it over and pressed his lips to it, before running his tongue over a blue vein. That made Will shiver and his blush spread from his cheeks to the rest of his face. "But now I can smell it more clearly. You need a doctor, Will."

"I... What kind of doctor?"

"You said you heard things. Hallucinations."

"Yes." Will's hand was numb and electrified at the same time. "I-I heard things just now. Earlier, at Budge's shop. A dog - an animal - in pain. I couldn't stop myself, I went out and checked, and when I got back they'd been killed and it was my fault-"

"Not your fault," said Hannibal, cutting him off before he went down that path of self-loathing. He gathered Will close and hugged him gently, pressing his cheek to Will's torso. "I'll make a call to Dr Donald Sutcliffe. He's a neurologist, well-known in his field, and a friend of mine from the days in school. We'll find out what this is, Will. I fear it's a brain tumor or encephalitis, but if we arrest the illness early you will be quite, quite safe."

Will returned the embrace, his arms wrapped awkwardly around Hannibal's shoulders. "Is it wrong that I'd rather it be a brain tumor than..."

"Than madness?"

"Yes." Hannibal heard Will's sharp intake of breath. The younger man tightened his hug. "I fear madness more than disease."

"We shall hope for the best then."

Chapter 4

"It'll be over fairly quickly," said Dr Sutcliffe. "Just make sure you keep still."

Will gulped and exhaled heavily. Hannibal squeezed his fingers briefly and followed Dr Sutcliffe out. The machine started up and slowly drew Will into its gaping maw. He could only pray that, when he emerged, there would be an answer.

And if there were none?

He shoved the thought into the deepest shadows of his mind. He had to hope.

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"Well," said Donald, watching through the glass as the machine did its job, "he's quite different from your usual."

"He is quite different," Hannibal agreed.

Donald glanced over. "So what's your prognosis?"

"Encephalitis."

"That's interesting. Why would you say that?"

Hannibal favored Donald with an amused quirk of his lips. "He's been hallucinating and there's a distinct scent. A fevered sweetness."

Donald shook his head. "That trick of yours has more uses than identifying nurses' perfumes, I see."

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Will felt as though he was shaking himself apart from the inside with nerves. His stomach clenched as he was ushered into an uncomfortable chair, but when Hannibal stood beside him and placed a hand on his shoulder, Will felt a calm impose over his nerves.

If Will didn't appreciate it so much, he would be worried about Hannibal's influence on him. His immediate emotional response was almost Pavlovian. Was it good that Hannibal could settle him this easily? Why was this possible?

"Well, your scans," said Dr Sutcliffe, putting the images up for them to view, "show that the right side of your brain is inflamed. You have NMDA encephalitis. It's good that Hannibal insisted on your coming in."

"Oh thank God," Will breathed out, and further shocked himself by bursting into tears. He curled up, face in his hands and elbows on his knees, feeling the relief shudder from his core into his limbs. It was as though a weight had been shed from his shoulders.

He wasn't going insane.

He was not broken.

"If you don't mind, Will may need some time alone," Hannibal said to the neurosurgeon, his hand now in the middle of Will's back.

"Of course," said Dr Sutcliffe graciously.

After the neurosurgeon was out of the room, Will unfolds, half-afraid Hannibal would have left too. Instead he found Hannibal watching him from the other chair, eyes unfathomably placid.

Hannibal inclined his head slightly. "I won't judge you for crying, if that's what you are concerned about. If you wish, I can go out of the room, give you space to compose yourself."

"I... I just - I don't want you to leave."

A strange light came into Hannibal's gaze. "As you wish."

Sometimes, as he did now, Will had the sense that Hannibal was *studying* him. Not as a psychiatrist with a patient, not clinically distant, but as a lepidopterist examining a new species of butterfly. Something entirely other and outside of humanity, perhaps.

Tentatively, Will reached out to touch Hannibal's wrist. The older man turned his hand and held Will's, the touch firm and grounding. Will wanted to say something, but the words dissolved into silence on his tongue. He gazed at Hannibal, willing the other man to read his mind.

Hannibal smiled gently and said, "You'll be admitted for treatment. We can talk about it after you're better."

"I don't even know what *it* is," murmured Will.

"This unnamed amorphous thing between us will define itself with clarity and rest, dear Will." Hannibal stood. "Come. Dr Sutcliffe will tell you more about the treatment you need."

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Alana came to visit on the second day of his hospitalization, just before dinnertime. She was in a scarlet dress with a pattern of white chain links wrapped about her, and she had brought a huge bouquet sunny yellow lilies and bright orange-red roses.

"You've brought in the sunshine," Will said with a tired smile.

"And you certainly need some," said Alana, setting the flowers aside and going over to sit on the edge of the bed. Her gentle gaze swept over Will, hooked up to the drip and washed out by fluorescent lights. "I'm glad you're getting better."

"Me too." He sat up, conscious of his rumpled and unshaven state. "I'm glad it's merely encephalitis." The rest of the sentence was not spoken, but from the flicker in Alana's eyes, not unheard.

"An inflammation of the brain being preferable to other possibilities?"

"Yes. Infinitely."

Will then asked about the dogs. Alana reassured Will that the dogs were fine, and then shared about the lecture she delivered in Will's place. As she spoke, he looked at her lips - still kissable, and then at the print of chains wrapped about her. What was she constrained by? He blurted, "I don't regret the kiss that night."

A pause, pregnant with possibilities, hanged in the air.

Then Alana sighed. "I have to be honest with you and with me." She took his right hand. "I shouldn't have - shouldn't have kissed you. I have - feelings - for you."

"Yet you think you should not have kissed me despite having feelings for me."

"Yes. Because I am not good for you and-and you are not good for me," said Alana, her voice steady even if her grasp is trembling. "I have a professional curiosity about you and I won't be able to shut that off and you'll resent me for it. And I can't just... have an affair with you. It's not fair to you or me."

Will already suspected as much, but it didn't make hearing it any easier. He squeezed her fingers in gratitude. "I appreciate that."

"I will always be your friend, Will," she said.

He smiled. "I am grateful for your friendship, Alana."

"I heard that it was Hannibal who got you here in time," she said

"He told you?" A swift sharp sourness stung Will's heart. He had difficulty recognizing the emotion at first, and then realized it was jealousy.

Jealous? About whom?

"I had dinner with him last night," Alana went on blithely, not noticing Will's change in mood. "He was rather concerned about the food they will provide you with, and I told him that it will be nutritional. He just gave me this look - you know the one?"

"Like he would roll his eyes if he wasn't so refined? This is Hannibal we're talking about," said Will, using a half-smile to mask the jealousy bubbling inside. "I eat anything, really. Hospital food doesn't faze me."

She raised an eyebrow and her smile deepened. "You need to take better care of yourself, Will. Else you can't blame people wanting to take care of you."

"I won't complain, at least for the time being." Will glanced at the IV drip. "I'm about as useful as a limp noodle right now. Being taken care of has a certain appeal."

As though on cue, the door to the ward opened to admit Hannibal, carrying a large bag and his case in one hand. In the other arm he had a bouquet of orchids in delicate purple and mauve. He saw Alana sitting on the side of Will's bed, their hands linked.

"Alana," said Hannibal, "I wasn't aware you were paying him a visit today."

Is that a note of displeasure in Hannibal's tone? Will could not squash the hopeful whisper of a thought in time, and was alarmed by its insinuations.

Hannibal, for his part, seemed entirely affable. "If I had known you'll be here, I would have made extra." He was setting out Tupperware as he spoke, as careful in their placement as he would in his home.

"Oh, it's alright, I have to go." Alana rose, but not before hugging Will briefly and wishing him a 'get-well-soon'. "Take care, Will. I'll come by another day."

There was a tension that lingered in the room after she had gone. Will plucked nervously at the edge of the blanket, but he was unsure what he was nervous about.

"Have you eaten?" Hannibal asked.

"Hm? Oh, uh, not yet. They should be coming by any time-"

"Then we will dine together. Come." The doctor came to him and helped him out of the bed.

Will relished the contact. Hannibal's hands were large and competent, every gesture as graceful and confident as the man himself. He sat down and watched as the other man divested himself of his jacket, folding it over the back of the chair.

"I had initially planned on making a silkie chicken broth with ginseng and red dates," said Hannibal, "but that will have to wait until your course of medication is complete. That will boost your immune system. Right now, your immune system is in overdrive and we need it to weaken."

"You were planning to make me chicken soup."

Hannibal leveled him with a Look. "Yes."

Will chuckled. "Alright, I bow to your expertise in culinary matters. What are we having?"

"We," Hannibal said with mild amusement, "are having shiitake, carrot, and lotus seed soup. Neutral but energizing."

"I don't think I've ever had lotus seeds," said Will, poking about his soup. He stopped when he felt the weight of Hannibal's disapproval. "Sorry."

They dined in silence for a bit, Will enjoying the sweet soup with his tri-colored rice. After a while, Hannibal asked, "What did you and Alana talk about?"

"We... we talked about the, um... She told me I would be bad for her and that she would be bad for me because she had a professional curiosity about me." Appetite abruptly lost, Will leaned back in his chair. "She said she had feelings for me but... Well. It's the 'it's not you, it's me' speech, except it's also me. My instability - that she didn't mention, because she is a good friend."

Hannibal smiled a little more widely. "For someone whose brain is half-inflamed, your mind is no less powerful."

"Are you attracted to my mind?"

"I am. And to the rest of you." Hannibal looked at Will, waiting until their gazes locked. "I am attracted to the whole of you, and what you are. What you can become in the future."

A lump came into Will's throat. He tore his gaze away and stared at the dull hospital floor. Tiny little flecks of gray and brown on sand-colored floor. Like dust in Brownian motion, caught for an instant, each particle buffeted by invisible forces.

However he looked at it, he was caught before he had even registered that there was a net. He at least had the integrity to admit this to himself. Now to have the integrity to admit this aloud.

"Will?" The older man peered curiously at him. Again that otherworldly regard.

"I have... feelings for you." Will swallowed. "I am also, for the lack of a better word, afraid of you."

Hannibal narrowed his eyes. "Afraid?"

"Not that you would do me harm," Will clarified hastily, "but that... that I would put more meaning into this - thing - between us, than you would. That I will rely so much on your steadiness that I-I forget how... When you leave, will I be able to remain stable?"

A small crease appeared between Hannibal's eyebrows. "'When' I leave?"

"Everyone leaves."

"So far, perhaps," said Hannibal quietly. He set down his utensils. "I do not invest my time or emotions lightly. I do not intend to leave, and I will fight for you, should you decide to martyr yourself and end our relationship."

"You seem very sure of this."

"I know myself better than anyone else, Will. Among my less-than-stellar qualities is possessiveness, which is why I chose to indulge in affairs in the past. Less mess. But with you, Will, an affair is impossible."

Will felt an elation expand in his chest. He raised his eyes and watched the other man closely. "You're not one to shy away from an impossible challenge."

"No," said Hannibal, lines crinkling the outside of his eyes. "I am not."

Chapter 5

Jack made a quiet visitor. That didn't surprise Will - Jack tended to fill the space at the BAU to make sure everyone knuckled under, but he was still sensitive to mood and situation, or he would not have been made head of that particular unit.

That Jack brought peaches did surprise Will.

"I do follow conventional etiquette," Jack said, reading Will's expression accurately. He snorted as he sat down. "You should have told me you weren't feeling well."

"I thought it was just a flu," the invalid replied meekly. He sat up and put on his glasses, his fingers playing at the edges of his blanket. Should he do it? He had yet to decide what it was he felt for Hannibal, but if he didn't do something now, it could come back to hurt the psychiatrist. He risked a glance at Jack.

The other man smiled. Almost paternal. Perhaps he did feel responsible for Will Graham. "What is it, Will? You look like you have a question."

"I... I'm considering stopping my sessions with H-Dr Lecter." He hoped Jack didn't catch the slip. "I mean, I'm not formally his patient, but I have been going to his office and having regular conversations and... I-I'd like to stop."

"Is there a reason for this consideration?"

"I just- I don't think this is a relationship I wish to cultivate." Will swallowed dryly. "I'll ask him for a referral, or maybe i could ask Alana."

"Dr Bloom told me she'd rather have a friendship with you." if Jack was curious, he was hiding it well.

Will smiled wryly. "She also has a professional curiosity about me." He managed to keep the bitterness out of the phrase. He had to resolve this within himself soon. He was attracted to Alana, had been for years, but did not make a move until that night when he felt unstable. Then he reached out for stability, but she could not offer it to him. "I think that would be a better relationship for us to cultivate. She will always have that curiosity about me, and I trust her enough not to abuse the privilege."

"Are you saying Dr Lecter has abused the privilege?"

"God, no. it's just that... I don't feel comfortable talking about - about certain things with him." Will flushed and stared at his knuckles. That much was true. He didn't feel comfortable talking about them. Thing was, Hannibal often intuited what Will didn't say, or led the conversation down an unexpected path. Hannibal was a fantastic dance partner when it came to their chats; each took the lead as and when they pleased, and the other partner never faltered in following.

Jack sighed. "As long as you can find someone to be your paddle, Will. I need you on the team."

They talked a little longer, Will asking Jack about some old cases and how they were cracked. Jack would be a good teacher - he knew what details Will would like to hear and gave them accordingly. Jack stayed for less than half an hour before he got a call.

"You could send me pictures if you want," Will offered.

Jack put his phone in his pocket and shot Will a quelling, if fond, glare. "You focus on getting better. We'll talk about you and your conversations with Dr Lecter when you've come back."

"Jack?"

"Yes?"

Will licked his lips and raised his eyes to look Jack in the face. "Don't tell him about this, not yet. I'd rather it came from me."

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Treatment took longer than Will liked. There were times he felt as though he was not getting better - the hallucinations returned, for a time, and he had to be restrained when he started behaving violently - but those soon passed. He had plenty of time to mull over what he felt for Hannibal, sort out any lingering affections he had for Alana. Figure out what he truly wanted.

Alana came by a few times, usually with Jack and twice with Beverly. Always with company. That meant Will had not had the opportunity to talk about what he said to Jack with her, and he was chary of discussing it with Hannibal before he knew what he wanted from the other man.

Hannibal came to visit practically every other evening, bearing delicious broths or soups purported to have healing effects. They talked around their non-relationship, by discussing their past partners. Will had laughed out loud one evening when Hannibal described being dragged to a society party by his then-partner, who got into a fist-fight with an ex.

"It was crude and unbecoming," Hannibal had said with a dry smirk. "And I left him to nurse his bruises all by himself when I drove off without him. I heard later that he had to beg for cash to go home."

"That is such a dick move." Will had grinned. "I promise I don't have exes whom I'll end up brawling in public."

"I was still young and brash then," Hannibal had admitted. He shrugged, elegant and regal in his dismissal. "I picked up social graces later in life."

Will had raised an eyebrow. "If this happened now, you'll probably call him a cab and make sure he's sent home, say something cutting to the ex, and then apologize to the hostess. Then you will meet your partner to end the affair... possibly with an injunction that you don't appreciate being made use of."

"Made use of?"

"He was showing you off, I presume. That was why the ex attacked your partner. You were being thrust into the limelight as nothing more than an exotic Ming vase," Will had said. "That must have felt so insulting."

Hannibal had smiled, the corners of his eyes crinkling. "It was. My ego was assuaged when his took a beating."

If Will still doubted that he really liked Hannibal, it had long since been dispelled. He looked forward to seeing the older man in a attitude more appropriate to an adolescent looking forward to a concert; the lurch in his diaphragm whenever the door opened wasn't feigned.

Still, Hannibal gave Will sufficient space and time. Will liked that Hannibal respected his boundaries; he only hoped that in the future, such respect remained. He didn't like the idea of two persons bleeding together into one entity. Two binary stars, forever engaged in a whirling dance, pulled together and forward by mutual gravitational force - now that he could accept, could look forward to. And by the time the stars collided they would be old, and by then it wouldn't matter.

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"You're finally discharged tomorrow," said Alana with a wide smile. For once she was here alone.

Will managed not to grin too cheerfully. He had chafed the past few nights at being trapped in the hospital. He ached for his dogs - thankfully, Alana took them in while he was undergoing treatment - and already he was packed. "It'll be nice to sleep without the smell of antiseptic and illness."

Alana laughed. "And instead sleep in a room smelling of dogs."

"I'm used to dogs. Thank you for taking care of them." He nudged his glasses up his nose and pretended to read the magazine Jack brought him the day before. "I should treat you to a meal or something. Not a-a date."

"There's no need, Will. I'm glad to help."

"I may need your help again. Soon. Or maybe your advice," said Will, suddenly nervous. However long he chewed on the issue, he had not found his answer. Perhaps an external perspective would prove useful. "I... I'm thinking of... Remember that night when we kissed?"

Her lips twitched. "Hard to forget." She narrowed her eyes and pulled up a chair. "What about that night?"

"After we... after we kissed, I went to a-a friend's, and I told him, and, uh... suffice to say I think I have feelings for him. I just don't know what those feeling are. Rebound from a rejection, perhaps? Or a clutch for stability..." He trailed off, his right hand curling around his left wrist like a shackle. "I don't even know if I should pursue it. Whatever it is."

Alana studied Will for a few seconds. He just as studiously avoided her gaze. When she giggled it was nearly a shock: Alana was always so poised and graceful. She covered her mouth when Will stared at her, but her amusement shone from her eyes.

"You're talking about Hannibal, right?"

Will bit the inside of his cheek. "Well, you're good. Picking him out of my extensive social circle."

"Did you kiss him? Is he a good kisser?"

"Wha- Alana!"

"He's been very curious about you since he started seeing you for sessions." The woman swept her hair behind her ear, her cheeks pink from laughter. Then she grew more serious. "I've never thought about him and you as a couple though. You seem so different. But now that I *am* thinking about it..."

Embarrassed and shy, Will fidgeted with a corner of his fly-fishing magazine, folding and unfolding it. His hand jerked when she placed hers over it. Looking up, Will was glad that there was only gentle affection in her face. He wouldn't know what to do if she had been curious or censorious.

Alana squeezed his hand once and let go. "I told you I think too much. Perhaps that's what you're doing too."

"So I should just go for it? Not think about it?"

"You wouldn't know how it'll turn out until you try it," she said quietly. "I can't give you any idea of what he's like in a relationship. I've never seen him in a relationship."

"He doesn't-" Will mumbled, and licked his lips. "He told me he doesn't do relationships. And that an affair with me would be impossible."

"He's very insightful and incisive."

Will glanced at her, saw the words unspoken beneath her steady gaze. He swallowed dryly and managed a smile. "I know he is. I don't think it will be good for us to continue our... conversations. I'm going to talk to him about it and maybe he could give me a referral... or maybe I'll come to you."

Alana smiled and shook her head, her dark brown hair tumbling from her shoulder. "Don't tempt me, Will. You know I would love to write something on you."

"Everybody does. At least with you, I can be assured that you'll try your utmost to be fair." He sat up straighter. "Okay. So, this thing with Hannibal. I... I'm nervous. About how it'll turn out."

She tilted her head, studying him again, this time more assessing. "You could do with a shave and a haircut," she allowed, "but I'm sure he doesn't care. Hannibal is self-contained; he influences those he comes in contact with, but we so seldom make a ripple in his world. Except maybe for you, if he's looking to build a relationship with you."

He stared at the picture in the magazine blindly, the back of his neck and cheeks growing hot.

That's the main difference, isn't it? While I inhabit the skins of people I meet far too easily, he hardly lets anyone pass the walls of his fortress. Compared to him, I might as well be porous.

Alana patted his hand and said, "I think he'll be good for you. And you'll be good for him. You'll offer each other new perspectives from which to experience the world."

"I hope you're right," Will said, so softly that it might well have been a prayer.

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Hannibal escorted Will home.

There was no other word for it: the older man took his bags, despite his protests, listened more attentively than Will to the doctor's injunctions, and kept a hand in the middle of Will's back until he was safely ensconced in Hannibal's Bentley. Despite himself, Will drifted into a light doze in the heated car, lulled by Tchaikovsky and Strauss.

Along the way, at every stop, Hannibal takes the chance to catalog the minutiae of Will's presence. His scent is stronger and healthier, no longer tainted with infection, though the smell of hospitals clung to him. The sweep of his lashes on his cheeks, the steady rise and fall of his chest, the neat hair on his arms, the faint moistness of his lips. it was remarkable how this unassuming man filled the rooms of Hannibal's mind with his presence. Before, Hannibal performed for an audience he wasn't sure would see the artistry of his work; he had allowed them that. An audience was better than none.

And then Will Graham came along. Will Graham who could breathe the air of killers and think like them, become them, and yet remained resolutely himself.

Will Graham, with his empathy and his brilliance and his stark frankness and his lovely, *lovely* eyes that looked so much bluer and brighter when filled with pain and fear and confusion.

Now... now he wanted to compose something solely for Will Graham, because this young man would see and he would know and he would *understand.*

Will I risk my freedom for this? Hannibal thought, making the turn down the long dusty drive to Will's home. To perform, even once, for a patron who would understand and appreciate the art that sang in Hannibal's veins...

It was tempting.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

> Dear Fannibal readers: if you haven't signed up for Twitter, please do so and look for me (@kt_adrienne). Lots of exciting #SaveHannibal action going on so come join in to save our show!

Hannibal had been debating internally whether to stay with Will for a while or just give him his own space, let him settle back into his home. However, when the doctor saw Alana waiting outside Will's house with the dogs, he made up his mind.

"Will?" he said, gently shaking the younger man. "We're home."

The deliberate choice of words might not register immediately, but Hannibal knew Will would recall them later, roll them over on his tongue, taste the *rightness* of them.

"Hmmpf?" Will blinked and swept his hair from his brow. Hannibal had to smile at Will's rumpled state; there was something defiantly innocent about the man, as though he resented the horrors that lurked in his mind. He let the profiler gather his wits about him properly and straighten up in his seat. "Sorry. I didn't mean to sleep. Thought I'd have got that out of my system by now."

Hannibal smiled indulgently as he undid his own seat belt. "Your body is trying to regain its strength. Sleep is one of nature's best restoratives."

"At least I don't have those odd dreams anymore..." Will muttered to himself, stepping out of the car and reaching into the back for his belongings.

The doctor came round to Will's side of the car and took the bag before Will could stop him. The gentle warmth in his eyes stopped Will from sputtering a protest, but heat spread from Will's cheeks to his ears and the back of his neck. He had little time to react though - a flurry of wagging tails and excited furry bodies plowed into him, every dog determined to check him over from head to toe.

"Hey, sweethearts," Will said with a laugh, squatting down and accepting the dogs' enthusiastic licks and kisses. He draped his arms over Winston and Atticus, hugging them tightly, and then embraced each of the others. He had missed them so much - every night in the hospital had sounded wrong without the snuffling and faint snoring of seven dogs.

Hannibal watched him for a little while, enraptured by the sheer bliss and open joy on Will's face. Seeing this expression assured Hannibal that he had not made the wrong decision in getting Will's encephalitis treated; there had been a niggling fear that once the fever was

broken, Will would revert to the closed-off, fearful man that told Hannibal he did not find him interesting.

"Hello Hannibal," said Alana as she came up to his side quietly, disrupting his thoughts. She was in a dark navy coat, with a brilliant scarlet scarf around her neck. "Will looks much better."

Hannibal thought briefly about recreating this image, this lovely creature's neck wrapped by a white cashmere scarf stained with crimson life, her dark tresses a halo around her fair face, her slender curves hidden by midnight blue sheets. He had not forgotten that Will had kissed her before he came to Hannibal. If Alana had accepted Will's advances, Hannibal supposed he would have eaten her tongue. She had always had the most exquisite palate.

"He does," he said. "If he had not had it treated sooner, I wonder what damages his brain would have suffered."

"Good thing you caught it then." Alana smiled at her mentor. "Thank you."

Hannibal inclined his head. "No thanks necessary. Will is my dear friend."

She flicked an inquisitive and teasing glance at him which he pretended not to notice. They watched Will play with the dogs for a while longer, tossing sticks and tugging on collars. Then Alana said, "I've bought Will extra dog kibble but they're too heavy for me. Would you mind?"

Having no reason to decline other than his personal desire to watch Will, Hannibal took on the job of unloading the dog food from Alana's car. He didn't miss the amused glint in her eyes, and contemplated whether she would have tried to scream.

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Will was feeling tired but happy. Buster kept jumping up at him, his training all forgotten, while Chutzpah nearly tripped him over because she kept circling his legs. It was clear they missed him, and he fussed over them as best as he could.

"Here, let me get them off you," Alana laughed, shooing Buster aside. She looked mischievous, but before Will could ask, she pulled him into a tight hug and pressed her lips to his cheek.

Will was so startled he did not quite know what to do. He returned the hug awkwardly. He noticed Hannibal pausing at the screen door with two large bags of dog kibble, his expression inscrutable. The older man went into the house and Will could no longer see him.

"I'm glad you're better," Alana said quietly against Will's stubbled face.

"Thanks, Alana," he said. "Dinner someday."

"I'll settle for lunch." She grinned at him. "Do make sure you get some rest later, Will. Don't let Jack get you back to work before your doctor says so. I'm gonna go."

Will waved her goodbye before going up the steps. The dogs clustered around his legs and he shushed them, getting them to calm down. Hannibal opened the door for him, his lips curving faintly in a warm smile of welcome. He was still wearing his coat though he had turned on the space heater.

"Thanks, Hannibal," Will said, suddenly aware that they were alone. The dogs squeezed past them and sniffed at the room, investigating their home all over again. Will took no further notice of them; Hannibal was barely a pace away from him, and it felt like there was not enough air in the room.

The doctor brushed over Will's cheek - right where Alana had kissed him - and then slowly, inexorably, started moving forward, backing the younger man into the wall by the door. Will felt his breath escape him when his shoulders pressed against the solid wall. The difference in height between them was not that great, at most a couple of inches, if that much, but Hannibal loomed; Will felt his knees nearly buckle.

And, *oh,* that image of him kneeling there, with Hannibal standing *there,* and Will peering up... He licked his lips.

Hannibal's small, sharp intake of breath didn't escape Will's notice. He was not touching the profiler, but he was very, *very* close. His expensive scent was making Will giddy -that's what the younger man told himself anyway - and he could see a stray hair on Hannibal's lapel.

So close. So close.

When Will's gaze skimmed up Hannibal's throat and chin and met those gloriously warm brown eyes, he was practically aching with the need for Hannibal to touch him. He licked his lips again, slower and more deliberate, and parted them with a sigh.

"Have you thought?" Hannibal asked in a hypnotic murmur. He was staring not at Will's eyes but at his mouth.

"I have," said Will, half lost in thought over where he would want Hannibal's hands to be.

"And what conclusion have you drawn about what you want us to become?"

"I..." Will could not help himself; his hands grasped Hannibal's coat, and slipped inside to brush his hands over the soft camel-colored sweater Hannibal wore, feeling the solid warmth beneath the layers. "I want us. To. I-I want."

It was hard to think. He was getting hard, from just touching Hannibal over his clothes and not even kissing and with his back pressed to the wall and the room still cold and-

"I want us," he echoed. "I want - I want us. I like you. More than like. I just... does it have to be more than this right now?"

The doctor took one of Will's hands and squeezed the fingertips. Will nearly sagged to his knees from the touch. Hannibal didn't seem to notice. "I don't want to be your rebound, crude

as that may sound," he said. "After all, you came to me only because Alana rejected you and-
"

"Shut up," Will interrupted, and surprised himself and Hannibal by surging forward to capture the older man's mouth in a devouring kiss. It felt better than Will remembered, so warm and faintly spicy and deliciously wet; Hannibal's aftershave was a rich bass note in his mind, with underlying tones of herbs and copper and cooked meat, a deeply satisfying and unique scent. Will heard a pleading moan and was shocked that it had come from him, but when Hannibal crowded him into the wall and pressed his entire frame against Will, the younger man let his momentary embarrassment dissipate.

This was good. He needed to see Hannibal's control slip, the way it slipped that night in the kitchen after he had fled to Hannibal's house, after Hannibal gave in to unprofessional desire and - *oh. Oh.*

Hands, large, skillful hands used to fountain pens and pencils and knives and scalpels, wonderfully competent and confident hands had skated up Will's arms and over the back of his shoulders, and then one hand tangled strong fingers into Will's curls and *pulled*.

The shock of pleasure arced electric-bright from scalp to toes. If it didn't feel so damned good, Will would have *died* from the shame of the needy whine that erupted from him. His toes curled and he cursed silently the lousy heating in his home, the clothes that separated their bodies, the entire *world* for him not realizing that this was it, this was what he needed-

"That was good?" Hannibal asked, his accent thickened with desire.

"Yes, fuck yes," Will groaned, baring his neck as he tried to nuzzle more of his hair into Hannibal's grip. When Hannibal bent to lap and suck on Will's exposed neck, the resulting moan made the doctor shove Will hard against the wall. "Hannibal - god, you should - would you-"

"Yes, a thousand times yes," Hannibal replied, his words pressed into fair skin. He yearned to consume Will, drink him in and swallow him whole, never let him out again. He would protect Will until he was ready to emerge into his true self-

A loud ringing disrupted their moment of intimacy. Hannibal and Will froze *in situ*, their fervor derailed by the incessant demand of a cell phone. Will reached into the pocket of his pants and plucked it out.

Both of them glared at the number.

Hannibal stepped back and discreetly adjusted himself, while Will ran a hand through his disheveled hair as he answered, "Hello, Jack. I just got out of hospital and you're calling me in?"

*****

Jack will make a fine roast, thought Hannibal viciously, though outwardly he was nothing but composed calm. Will had begrudgingly agreed to assist in profiling a case. Hannibal started

on his long drive home, and then along the way made a detour. There was someone he had to visit.

He was not pleased with Jack at all, and even less pleased with the success of Alana's little jibe to make him jealous. It had goaded him into moving faster than he wanted; he had originally wanted Will to come to him, to willingly lay his submission at Hannibal's feet. For Will to demand to belong. Instead Hannibal had cornered Will, and while that had been decidedly pleasant, Will was not yet ready to be tethered to Hannibal completely.

Our boundaries have not blurred enough, he thought. *I will be your world as much as you are becoming mine.*

It would take some persuading, but if Hannibal played his cards right, Will was going to yearn for safe harbor once more before the end of the week. The doctor soon pulled up to Port Haven and smiled.

Abigail would be pleased to see him.

Chapter 7

When Will arrived at the lab, Jack only gave him the most perfunctory top-to-toe scan before handing him a folder. "I know you prefer to work with a fresh crime scene, but it's already been cleaned up. This is what we have. Victim's in the morgue. Zeller has the report."

As he flipped through the images, Will couldn't blame Jack for calling him in. It was gruesome. Beth LeBeau's face had nearly been ripped off her skull, and the Glasgow smile was ghastly enough that even Will felt a sympathetic twinge of pain in his cheeks. The forensics team had been unable to find much usable evidence. Jimmy Price had to have been particularly put out that there was only a somewhat smudged partial to work with. The team also noted that there was a sizable hole in the roof - Will supposed that was the entry point.

"She lived alone out in the woods," said Will, his thoughts spinning into high gear, "but the valuables were not taken and she was not - not sexually violated. She wasn't killed for a purpose, Jack."

"Excuse me?"

"Her death was not the intended purpose. Whoever killed her didn't mean to. They went into her home for something else. Entered her home and... went straight to her bedroom." Will nibbled on his lower lip - he had to push aside the memory of Hannibal's teeth scraping over that same lip - and added, "Whomever killed Beth LeBeau knew her, or knew her home well. No hesitation, no deviation from entry to exit. The killer came, killed Beth LeBeau, and left. But they didn't go there to kill her."

"The killer nearly took her face off, Will."

"That... that feels like... desperation. It's not intention." Will exhaled. He could feel the shadows waiting on the perimeters of his mind. A new nightmare, perhaps.

So nice to be healthy again.

Jack sighed. "A friend? Boyfriend? It'd have to be someone she trusted to bring them out to that isolated cottage."

Will shrugged. His imagination worked far better when he could feel the space around him, taste the emotions, let his mind fill the shape of the hollow shell of the killer, take on their shape. Pictures limited his empathy. "I don't know if she brought them there, or if they had been there before and were waiting in ambush."

Taking the file back, Jack said, "Beverly said there was dead tissue under Beth LeBeau's nails. She fought, but all the cells she scraped off weren't from someone with healthy skin."

"Leprosy-"

"Jack!" Jim Price skidded into the office, barely pausing to open the door. "We have a clear print. Picked it up from the attic. Hey Will. Jack, the girl is very sick."

*****

*****

"Ever heard of Cotard's Syndrome?" Will asked without preamble when Hannibal admitted him into the office.

Hannibal frowned. It had been two evenings since the day he sent Will home. "Good evening, Will."

"Um, hey, sorry." The younger man let his jacket drop on the Freud's couch. He rubbed the tip of his nose. "Good evening, Hannibal."

"Jack's case?"

"New case." Will sighed and sat on the couch, absentmindedly playing with one of the pillows. "A girl. We've just met her mother. The girl's mentally unstable and... How does Cotard's Syndrome present?"

Hannibal took his customary seat, crossing his legs neatly. "It is a delusion, first of all. Someone suffering from Cotard's Syndrome believes that they are either dead or immortal. They deny their existence or believe that they're rotting, putrefying, losing blood... They have difficulty recognizing the humanity in themselves and often deny the presence of humanity in others."

"When you say deny the presence of humanity..."

"I mean," said Hannibal, tilting his head, watching the play of intense emotion flicker over Will's face, "that they do not see others are alive beings. They cannot relate the face they see to the person to whom it belongs. Sometimes they see their own face imposed over another's face - they are then further disconnected from the environment, their delusions further strengthened that they do not exist."

The FBI agent rubbed the back of his head. "Our suspect tried to peel back the face of the victim."

"Your suspect may have thought they were unmasking the victim. See the real face behind the one they do not accept as the right one."

Will's jaw worked and he hugged himself. All his thoughts were contained in him, a storm in a glass bottle, and Hannibal devoured every nuance of emotion and expression that he could discern in Will.

How does anyone feel so much without shattering? Hannibal wondered.

After about five minutes, Will looked up at Hannibal watching him, and to the older man's surprise, smiled quite sweetly. Will exhaled and scrubbed his hands over his hair, leaving his

curls in a greater mess. "Sorry, Hannibal. I'm being rude. I didn't mean to come and steal your brain."

"You've already stolen my heart, I wouldn't begrudge you any more of me."

"Cheesy," Will remarked, but his bashful grin and faint blush indicated that he had liked what Hannibal said.

The doctor stood and held out a hand, which Will took, and pulled the younger man close. Will flattened the hand not in Hannibal's grip on the older man's suit. He made no effort to escape. Hannibal luxuriated in the freedom to hold Will this close, resentful, spiky, *dangerous* Will Graham, here in his embrace like he belonged there.

Will's breath was warm where his face was tucked against Hannibal's neck. "This is your office."

"Something pleasant to while away dull hours."

"You get bored with your patients, doctor?"

"I'll never answer that question." Hannibal breathed in the scents from Will's temple. The aromas of sweat and skin, bad coffee, worse food, and the unforgettable smell of death - from the morgue, no doubt -as well as the smell of artificial pine air freshener crept into Hannibal's olfactory system. Under all that, Will smelled tired. It was likely he had not taken his medications and not yet dined.

Hannibal let his hand slide up Will's arm and squeezed lightly on his bicep. "May I kiss you?"

Obligingly, Will angled his face for a kiss, but just as their mouths brush together, Hannibal's private cell phone rang.

The younger man smiled. "Not my fault this time."

Hannibal exhaled heavily through his nose. "Excuse me, but this is my emergency line." He released Will and reached the phone on his table. A quick check of the caller ID gave him a brief glimmer of hope. "Hello, this is Dr Lecter."

Will picked up the pillow he had fidgeted with, and was contemplating going to Hannibal's for dinner before heading home when his own cell phone vibrated against his thigh. He tugged it out and answered it, greeting the caller just as he met Hannibal's gaze.

Hannibal's stricken gaze.

"Will?" It was Alana. She sounded like she was crying.

*****

Will knew he had taken his medication only because Hannibal had insisted before they drove all the way to Port Haven. He felt numb, suspended, unreal. Again and again his mind echoed

with Alana's words, coupled with the tears that had rolled down Hannibal's cheeks. He had driven them both because he had got to his car first.

Somehow they made it there with no incident, somehow they were inside, somehow walking past the gawkers and the curious and those who were actually supposed to be there. Will let Hannibal lead. He could barely see in front of him, barely register that they were now in front of Abigail's room, barely aware that he was using his FBI badge to gain them access to the scene.

The police officer opened the door for them to see, and then shut it immediately.

Will saw enough. More than enough. Hannibal covered his mouth and turned away. There was some conversation while the sea roared its turbulence in Will's ears. Again he let himself be led by Hannibal into one of the offices, and eventually he saw that they were not alone. Alana was there too, her lovely eyes red-rimmed and soft cheeks puffy. Hannibal had held out a hand to her, and they were talking in hushed, funereal tones.

"...I called to check in..."

"...I talked with her just the evening before last, told her Will was better..."

"...she was doing so well in group..."

"...the officer said there was a letter to Jack..."

"She killed herself," said Will, ignoring the other two. His words silenced them completely. "She smashed a teacup and used a shard to stab her neck. Where her father stabbed her. She even... All that blood. She let herself *die*. Whatever we tried to do..."

Alana sniffed sharply and had to look down; Hannibal patted her on her shoulder. The two psychiatrists sat that way for some time - Will merely stared at the wall before him - before Hannibal said, his voice thick with emotion, "We failed her. We all failed her."

Standing abruptly, Will said, "Hannibal, I'll drop you off. I need to feed my dogs."

"Alana?" Hannibal asked. "Will you-"

The woman nodded. "I'll be fine tonight. I'm going to stay at a friend's." She wiped her tears with the heel of her hand and licked her lips. "I'm... I'm going to call Jack later. He's going to get the letter and... I just. I wish."

Will placed his hand on the top of her head. Perhaps it was to absolve her of all blame. He didn't know.

*****

Will's closed-off reaction was not what Hannibal anticipated. He expected tears, vulnerability, something that would throw Will Graham into his arms, keep him there to be sheltered and pampered.

Not this bitter, anti-social man who drove too fast and glared at the road as though they had committed the worst crime of all.

Will didn't even kill the engine when they got back to Hannibal's office. He waited until the psychiatrist was at his vehicle before he sped off.

Hannibal was nonplussed. There he had gone to chat with Abigail about Will's recovery, that Will would soon be able to empathize with killers, that Will would be on their side utterly.

'I have a confession to make, Abigail, ' Hannibal said. *'I am in love with Will, and happily enough, he seems to reciprocate. Perhaps he has perceived my interest and is returning it. I don't think I can lie to him about anything if he asked. I hope he never asks me about Nicholas Boyle. Or about you.'*

Abigail had taken fright and done exactly what Hannibal had anticipated. It was perfect.

Will's response was not.

Had Abigail's death been a waste, then? Had he sacrificed this chess piece for nothing?

Hannibal again questioned his own wisdom in directing Will to a cure. In another world, Will would be so very agreeable, accepting, *malleable.* In this one he was an unknown variable again. Unpredictable. It was not a pleasing thought that Hannibal might have just sown the seeds for his own capture. If he had to choose between his own freedom and Will Graham, it would be a wrench to end the life of such an interesting mind.

Maybe not a kill. A precisely-broken neck. Trap that incredible mind in the confines of his body. Watch it shine irridescent, reflecting blood-red and shadow-night. I can even take him with me. I can care for him, show him everything that I want him to see. Show him art and death and life and God.

As he stepped into his own home and began preparing a light dinner, he worked out the details of turning Will into a paraplegic. It would limit Hannibal, in a way, because he would not be able to travel far for his hunts, but all he needed was the occasional pig to slaughter and dress and craft into the astounding works Hannibal knew he was capable of. Will would have to see, then. He would have to eat. He would be totally, utterly dependent on Hannibal.

At his mercy.

The idea sounded better and better. He could ask Chiyoh to come join him, leave the pig in the dungeon to die. Chiyoh to watch and guard Will when Hannibal was away. She was steadfast, and Will had to be more interesting a prisoner than the excrement she chose to protect. It would be perfect.

It was only when he had started on doing his dishes that the doorbell rang.

When Hannibal opened the door, he was surprised to see Will Graham.

"I've fed and watered my dogs, and asked my neighbors to check in on them tomorrow morning," Will said, but went on no further, because Hannibal had dragged him into a

punishing, yearning kiss, sharp teeth and hot tongue, desperate and almost afraid.

Hannibal held Will tightly, one hand cupping the back of the younger man's head and the other wrapped vice-like around his body, eliminating any space between them. After what felt like an eternity, Hannibal allowed them to part for a breath. The doctor curled his fingers through Will's hair and then kissed him again, light on the cheek and brow.

Will smiled, wobbly and pained. "I know I couldn't be alone tonight."

Hannibal smiled back. "Come in."

Chapter 8

It was clear that Hannibal didn't want to be alone any more than Will did. The doctor kept a light touch on Will while the latter shed his jacket and was ushered to the kitchen.

"What would you like to drink?" Hannibal asked.

Will shrugged and sat down in the armchair in the corner. He wasn't quite sure what he wanted other than to not be all by himself in his house, listening to the quiet snuffling and snores of his dogs. "Something hot. Not coffee."

The last thing he wanted was to stay awake, thinking about all the ways he had failed Abigail. The last time he spoke with her was over a blueberry cheesecake from a patisserie Alana said was good. They had been talking about something trivial. Something about footwear -

"She wanted new shoes," he said dully. "She said she wanted to get new sneakers when warmer weather came around. Something to go running in. We were discussing the different ways to.. to lace up running shoes." He inhaled sharply and tilted his head back. "I should've called more often. Visited."

"We were advised not to interact with her too often, Will." Hannibal paused as he filled a mug with scalding hot water. "We did what we thought was for the best."

"Except our best wasn't enough," said Will. He covered his eyes, squeezing down the burning sensation behind his lids. His voice sounded thick, as though he was nursing a cold. "Jack wants me in tomorrow to look at her - her note."

A sweetly rich scent announced Hannibal's approach. The doctor hunkered down and pushed the mug of hot chocolate into Will's hands. Hannibal's eyes were dark with emotion. After Will had taken a sip, Hannibal pressed a kiss to Will's brow.

"Jack has no tact," Hannibal said briskly. If not for the tautness of his jaw and the faint frown he wore around his eyes, he would seem almost placid. The man had incredible mastery of his expressions, no doubt honed through years of psychiatric practice.

However, what Will saw was aching sorrow, overlaid with guilt and no small amount of anger. As to at whom that anger is directed, Will supposed Jack, Alana, Hannibal himself and even Abigail all had a share. Putting the mug of hot chocolate on the counter, Will went to Hannibal and put a hand above the older man's elbow. When he had Hannibal's attention, the younger man let his hand slide down and clasped their hands together.

"If it wasn't my fault, then it's not yours either," Will whispered. He removed his glasses. "Don't blame yourself."

"It had to be something I said." Hannibal's grip tightened, and then he rested his cheek against Will's. "I can think of no other reason."

Will turned his face so his lips were on warm skin. "We don't know what shadows she carried with her, Hannibal." He let go of Hannibal's hand and circled his waist with his arms. "There is so much we don't know."

Hannibal turned to kiss Will softly. He said nothing.

*****

Will showered and changed into a gray tee and shorts, his usual sleepwear, and then stared at the bed in the guest room.

It's better this way, he thought. *I'll probably have nightmares tonight. I'll sweat and thrash about and Hannibal won't get to sleep at all.*

He clutched the soft cream-colored towel in his hand and exhaled slowly.

*****

Hannibal was sitting up in bed reading when Will walked into his bedroom. Flipping down the duvet, he patted the space beside him, and then set aside the book once Will had climbed in.

"Thank you," said Will. He tried not to be self-conscious about sharing a bed with his new lover. That this would be their first time sharing a bed under such circumstances... "I'm not the most restful companion but I'll keep to this side of the bed. I just... I didn't want to be alone."

Hannibal kissed him again, this time tasting not of chocolate but of minty toothpaste. "I appreciate the company too, Will, and I doubt either of us will be able to sleep well anyway."

"What were you reading?"

"Death, always cruel, Pity's foe in chief, Mother who brought forth grief, merciless judgment and without appeal!" Hannibal exhaled

Recognizing Dante, Will breathed out shakily. "I should be inured to death by now."

"You felt responsible for her," said Hannibal. He shifted to face Will. "There is something you must know. I won't blame you if you... if you choose to discontinue our relationship, but I need you to know before you see Jack tomorrow."

A cold fear gripped Will. He was as surprised by the fear as he was dreading what secret Hannibal was about to reveal; what was he going to lose now? His fingers dug into the bedding and he held his breath, inhaling only when he realized he wasn't breathing. He didn't want to know, but at the same time, he did need to know.

The psychiatrist looked at his hands, and then up at Will, straight into his blue-gray eyes.

"Abigail had a secret which I was privy to," said Hannibal. He reached out for Will's hand, and hesitated to take it. "She was... she was an accomplice in her father's killings. She also

killed Nicholas Boyle."

Will blinked at Hannibal's words. Disbelief settled on him like fresh snow, and a chill spread from his spine through his body. "She... You knew? How? Did she tell you?" He paused, his mind racing ahead. "When did she kill Nicholas Boyle?"

"That night at her house after we found Marissa Schurr's body. I came in the door, saw Alana knocked out, and went down to the living room. I was afraid that Nicholas Boyle had hurt Abigail but I saw-" Hannibal sucked on his upper lip briefly. "I saw Abigail, her hands red with blood, and Nicholas Boyle lying on the floor."

"You helped her hide the body."

"Yes," the doctor admitted. "She was as shocked as I was. Perhaps more. She was afraid that - that everyone would say she was her father's daughter. And I... I didn't want her to be put under a microscope any more than she already was. I didn't want her to face the trial of the public eye."

Will wanted to berate Hannibal, yell at him for hiding this, for abetting Abigail in her crime, but he couldn't. It would be hypocritical of him to do so. If it had been him on the scene, he would have done exactly the same thing. Hannibal's gaze, usually so fearless in seeking out Will's own, was downcast, and tears were rolling down sculpted cheeks. This was a complete reversal of the composed and contained Dr Lecter that Will was used to in their sessions, or even the affectionate yet restrained Hannibal Will was getting to know as a partner. Impulsively, Will leaned forward and kissed the tears away. He then pressed his lips to Hannibal's mouth, letting Hannibal taste his own guilt over keeping Abigail's secret. The kiss was tender and gentle, nothing passionate. Will shared the bitter salt of the tears with Hannibal carefully, shared the same regret over failing someone he considered a daughter.

They held each other in a loose embrace, Hannibal sipping forgiving kisses from Will, murmuring apologies under his breath for trying to help Abigail and failing spectacularly. It was some time before Will pulled away and whispered, "We'll see what Abigail wrote, figure out her frame of mind when she- When she decided."

Hannibal sniffed and managed a faint smile. He cupped Will's stubbled cheek and rested their foreheads together. Their breathing patterns synchronized and Will found himself relaxing into this strange hold.

"I'm glad you're here." Hannibal's voice was very quiet and low, more suited for a confessional. Then again, he did just admit to keeping Abigail's harmful secrets.

What does that make me? Will wondered. Aloud, he responded, "I'm glad to be here."

"Let's try to sleep."

*****

With the lights turned out, the bed felt much smaller than it did earlier. Will could feel every minute movement of Hannibal - neither of them were asleep yet - and he thought his own

breathing was abnormally loud.

There was a space between them, Will trying to keep to one side of the bed as promised, but what he really wanted was for them to be holding each other as they drift from conscious to unconscious state.

Hannibal rolled on his side and flicked on the bedside lamp. "This isn't working."

"No," said Will, embarrassed and hating that he was embarrassed. "I'll go back to the guest room."

"No you won't," Hannibal said, grabbing hold of Will's wrist before the FBI special consultant could flee. Instead, Hannibal tugged Will closer and put an arm over his waist. He pinned Will's hand to Will's chest, holding his position until Will settled into place as the little spoon. "I suspect we will rest better with each other as comfort."

Will flushed at the feel of Hannibal's warm breath and accented voice on his ear. It did feel better, like he belonged in this bed. He suspected the full grief would set in tomorrow, after he read the note. Then he would want long hours of solitude - or perhaps solitude shared with Hannibal - to work through everything about Abigail. The few smiles they had shared, the silent desperation lurking in her soulful eyes, the shock and fear as she had lain on that kitchen floor, the fact that she never managed to find a place for herself that was not tainted by her father...

Before he could start thinking more morose thoughts, he was asleep.

He was so soundly unconscious that he missed Hannibal pressing his lips to the back of his neck, just above the T1 vertebrae, mouthing silently, "I'm *very* glad you are here."

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Discussion of suicide.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal woke up before Will. With the freedom to observe his companion unguarded and defenseless, Hannibal breathed in Will's sleep-warm scent. It had been a restless night, but Hannibal had been able to head off Will's unsettling dreams before they woke him. A murmur and a soft kiss - always to the back of Will's neck; Hannibal was becoming addicted to having access to that spot - would soothe him, his limbs relaxing as though in Pavlovian response.

Hannibal intended to cultivate that response.

Some of Will's curls were stuck to his cheek, and his lips were slightly parted. Hannibal wanted to stroke the angular jaw, feel the scratch of stubble over the back of his fingers. The morning light was not forgiving. The shadows under his eyes spoke of many sleepless nights he had already spent over the killer with Cotard's Syndrome. Hannibal suspected that last night was the first night Will got any real, restful sleep.

With a soft sigh he got out of bed and pulled on his bathrobe, and then thought otherwise after he had completed his morning ablutions. He put on a red sweater instead.

Breakfast should be simple, he decided. The typical American fare, with his own touches of course, to calm Will's nerves. Familiar scents and tastes in an unfamiliar setting.

And when was the last time I cooked to suit someone else's palate? Humming Elgar's *Salut d'Amour* under his breath, he started the coffee machine and set about preparing eggs, sausages, and toast.

*****

Hannibal was mid-way through plating (he'd had the notion of serving breakfast in bed) when Will padded into the kitchen. His hair was still in disarray, his mouth open in a yawn, and his eyes were bleary and hooded.

He looked absolutely, adorably at home.

"Sit down, Will, I'll serve breakfast shortly," said Hannibal, his tone far too affectionate, partly to hide his own bemusement at thinking that Will was *adorable.* That was not a word he often employed to anything or anyone. It was too twee, too young.

He is *worthy of being adored,* he thought again, pouring a cup of coffee for the younger man, who still stood at the entryway, blinking at Hannibal sleepily.

Color stood high on Will's cheeks and he rolled his shoulders. "Morning," he grunted. Clearly Will was not a morning person. He walked - *lurched,* thought Hannibal with amusement -into the dining room, and had folded into his usual seat by the time Hannibal emerged from the kitchen. The cup was already empty, so the older man poured him more coffee. At least Will looked more alert now.

"Jack texted me," he said, picking up a forkful of scrambled eggs. "Wants me to go in, look at Abigail's note. I think he just wants to do an 'I told you so'."

"That does sound like Jack," Hannibal replied, sipping his own coffee. His mind raced ahead. Would Will divulge the secret that Hannibal entrusted him with?

Will closed his eyes and made a sound of enjoyment. "This is delicious. This is the best scrambled eggs I've ever tasted."

"Thank you."

"I'd like you there with me later."

That was unexpected.

Hannibal took a bite of bacon and hummed. "May I inquire as to the reason?"

With a grimace, Will put down his fork. A shadow passed over his face and he looked tired again, tired and old. Hannibal reached out and grasped Will's fingers, noting that Will's hand was not trembling. The sudden silence that fell over the table was heavy as a dark cloud over the sun.

"I need you there," Will said at last, his voice low and exhausted. "Can you be there? For me?"

"Of course." Hannibal took care to savor his meal, just in case. If Will noticed how much time Hannibal took to enjoy his meal, he said nothing.

*****

They drove their own cars but detoured to Wolf Trap first, because Will was worried about the dogs. Hannibal waited in his Bentley, fingers tapping on the steering wheel in time to Bach. It was a gambit to tell Will about Nick Boyle. Now the chips were on the table, and he had to wait for the hand to be played.

It would be so easy to snap his neck right now. I could make him mine, forever dependent on me. I could be his everything.

Yet Hannibal resisted. He would have this play out to the end, even if the ending was to be bitter.

*****

Jack was visibly surprised to see Hannibal striding into his office with Will. Alana was already there, dressed in a somber navy dress with a dark gold windowpane check. She had minimal makeup on, just sufficient to be presentable, and her eyes were dull.

"Good morning Dr Lecter," said Jack gravely. "I wasn't expecting Will to ask you along."

The doctor inclined his head after he sat down in the middle seat, blocking Alana from Will. "He requested for my presence."

"I thought it best to have my emotional ballast with me for this," Will said curtly. He did not meet anyone's gaze but crossed his arms over his belly. "What do you want to show me, Jack?"

The agent opened the thick folder in front of him and pushed a clear plastic envelope forward. "That," he said, "is Abigail Hobbs' suicide note."

Hannibal didn't do more than skim through the contents, but Alana and Will both studied it closely. Hannibal chose to watch Jack and Will; the former was trying an angle, the latter was inscrutable.

Finally Alana slumped back in her seat. "So she was her father's accomplice."

"You called us in for your 'I told you so' moment?" Will asked in a monotone. Ire and regret crackled from his skin.

"You said she was innocent, Will."

"I believed she was. I wanted to believe she was." Will removed his glasses and stared at Jack. "I wanted to believe that the girl I saved by killing her father needed to be saved, that she was innocent. I wanted - I wanted to see the best in people, for once. And this..." Will pushed out of his chair and stalked out of the office.

The hush in the office grew more uncomfortable by the second. Hannibal let the unease and awkwardness sink in, before saying, "He feels responsible for her death."

"I feel that I am more responsible for her death than he is," Alana said. Hannibal covered her hand with his briefly, and pulled away. She sniffed and added, "I was her doctor. I saw none of the signs. She wanted to move on, to... She wanted a future. Her future."

Jack exhaled slowly. "She had none. The guilt was eating her alive. I just wish I knew what happened to Nick Boyle. I'd been so sure she had something to do with his disappearance but she mentioned nothing about him."

"I'm sure you'll locate him," said Hannibal. He rose from his seat. "I feel worried about Will. Please excuse me."

*****

Hannibal found Will in the gents, washing his face in a basin. The psychiatrist stood just a pace behind Will and waited until Will straightened.

"It clears my head," he said when he saw Hannibal looking at him in the mirror. "Not that it helps."

"She confessed to being her father's accomplice."

"Yes." Will said nothing more. He just stared at Hannibal's reflection in the mirror, his hands braced on either side of the white porcelain sink. Finally he shook his head and said, "We should get back to Jack before he comes in and yells at us."

As Will passed Hannibal, the older man caught Will's elbow. "We can leave. You can go home, let grief work its course."

The profiler just smiled weakly. "I've a lecture in an hour. It's about the Hobbs murders. Minnesota Shrike... and the Shrike's child, following in her father's footsteps-" His voice trembled and he covered his eyes. "We could've been her fathers, Hannibal. I could've... could've made it up to her for taking away... and now I can't, not ever..." The words were choked off, painful, like digging nails into an open wound.

Will buried his damp face against Hannibal, clutching the back of his jacket as he tried to regain his composure. Stroking Will's curls, Hannibal murmured quiet reassurances, platitudes that meant nothing and everything.

It was this moment when agents Price and Zeller walked in, chatting about a new case. Price was the first to stop in his tracks when he saw Hannibal and Will in an embrace, and, off Hannibal's expression, he tugged Zeller away.

"...but we-" Zeller protested.

"-can use the ladies," said Price.

If Will noticed his colleagues' presence, he gave no sign of it. He just kept his face buried in Hannibal's jacket, breathing deeply. After a while, he stepped back and smoothed down the front of Hannibal's clothes. "Let's get back to Jack's office. I've something to tell him, and I need you there."

Hannibal nodded once. "As you wish, Will."

*****

By the time Hannibal and Will returned, Alana had gone. Jack was looking through the file on his table, pulling out crime scene photos and travel documentation.

Will shut the door and went up to his supervisor's table. "Jack? I have something to confess."

Jack looked up at Will, and then at Hannibal.

If Hannibal were a lesser man, his pulse would be racing by now. Instead he made himself comfortable in a seat near the door, ceding the floor to Will. There was no backup plan, no way of escape; they were in the heart of the FBI headquarters.

Hannibal watched Will, admired the white curve of his neck, and thought again of his hands spread over Will's throat.

Chapter End Notes

Elgar's Salut d'Amour

Chapter 10

"That sounds ominous." Jack's somber expression turned to mild curiosity. "Have a seat."

"I'd rather stand," said Will. He chewed the inside of his cheek and licked his lips. Better to rip off the bandaid. "Hannibal and I are seeing each other."

Jack raised his eyebrows. "I'm guessing you mean seeing each other in a romantic relationship."

"Yes."

If Will had expected an explosion, it didn't come. The agent merely leaned back on his chair and looked past Will, at Hannibal, and back to Will again. His thick fingers laced together in front of him, on the table, and let the silence drag out until it was just a touch past uncomfortable. Then he sighed and said, to Hannibal, "Not very professional, doctor."

"The heart wants what it wants, Jack."

"Will needs someone to keep him stable."

"*Will* is right fucking here, Jack," snapped Will. He exhaled heavily through his nose and added, "I believe you were right about Abigail, and I think she killed Nicholas Boyle."

*****

From his position, Hannibal could see how stressed Will really was. The man was practically humming with tension; anyone who didn't know him would attribute it to his feelings over Abigail Hobbs' death - which, Hannibal reflected, was pretty much everyone. Only Hannibal understood: Will was covering for him. He could have easily told the truth, that Hannibal had aided and abetted in Nicholas Boyle's murder.

Instead, Will said, "We know Nick Boyle knocked out both Alana and Hannibal. If he had wanted to kill Abigail, there was no one to stop him... except for Abigail herself."

"You insisted on her innocence, Will," said Jack.

"I didn't want to see," the younger man said with difficulty, voice thick with emotion. "I wanted her to... I wanted her to be a victim, not a killer. I didn't want to think that she's - that she was her father's daughter."

Jack hummed in a thoughtful monotone. Finally he said, "She couldn't have buried him far or deep from his house."

"No. We just have to wait for the spring melt."

"If we find his body, we'll clear his name and give him a proper funeral. But that means there is another killer out there. I don't believe Abigail Hobbs killed her friend. My gut says there

is a copycat, as you claimed before, and with Abigail dead..." Jack lets his words trail off before adding, "You have a class, I believe?"

Will shrugged. "Just a sad epilogue for a sad life."

Jack smiled briefly. "That story's ended, at least. Dr Lecter, may I speak with you for a moment in private? Thanks, Will, I'll see you when we have more news on Georgia Madchen. The police are looking for her now."

*****

Once Will had gone, Jack shut the door and rounded on Hannibal. He bristled with righteous fury. "I didn't think you'd overstep your bounds like this, Dr Lecter. He is supposed to be your patient!"

Hannibal wondered how many sausages could be made from Jack's gut. "We have had appointments, yes, but they are not paid sessions. He came to see me as a friend." The psychiatrist savored the word, felt it roll over his palate, and went on, "I can hardly be upset that he came to see me as more than a friend."

"You know better than to allow that to happen!"

"Do not raise your voice at me again, Jack. It's rude." Hannibal inclined his head. "Ever since he has made his intentions clear, we have not had conversations related to therapy. I am of course more than willing to recommend other psychiatrists who can help Will, but in the end it depends on whom he is comfortable talking to about what ails him."

Jack stuck his hands in his pockets. "If news about this gets out, you might lose your license."

"I won't, because he was never my patient, officially. Besides," Hannibal said with a small smirk, "I can keep him stable for far longer as his lover than as his psychiatrist. He is more open to me now than ever before, which means he can do more for you and the cases." He waited for the words to sink in, for Jack's ruthlessly pragmatic nature to absorb the implications. Then he said, "I have an appointment in an hour. Good day, Jack."

The FBI agent huffed and said gruffly, "Take care of him, Hannibal."

"Very paternal of you."

"Take care of him. That's all I ask."

Hannibal smiled. "That's all I want."

*****

After his lectures, Will went home to his dogs and serenity, of a sorts.

He should have told Jack about Hannibal's involvement. He should have. And yet he hadn't.

Abigail is lost to us already, he thought as he swept up the dog hair that had accumulated around the house. *Why throw Hannibal in?*

And yet.

The dogs seemed to sense his turbulent mood and behaved well, even when he took them out on a long walk, throwing tennis balls and bits of old rope for them to play fetch with. Kelly led the chase after a squirrel but led the pack right back without Will having to call for him; Gingerbread didn't snap at Buster for sniffing her too enthusiastically (though she did shove him away with a foot); Winston licked his hand whenever Will paused to watch the clouds.

By the time he and his pack returned to the house, Will was tired and nowhere near resolved with his decision not to turn Hannibal in. His heart lurched into his throat when he saw Alana on the porch, waiting.

"Hey," she said with a warm, tired smile.

"Hey," said Will.

She waited.

He unlocked the door but did not go in.

Eventually Alana said, "I'm still thinking about it."

Will almost wanted to ask what *it* was, but knew Alana did not deserve his smartass comments. He invited her inside and started the coffee machine. "Do you think I should have seen it?"

"Do you care if I do?"

"You're my friend. And her doctor. I want to know what you think."

She sat down and wrapped her hands around her coffee. Her nails were painted a bland, pale pink. Will liked them for not being red. It was a few minutes before she said, "You can't be expected to see everything, Will. You're not superhuman."

"And you shouldn't blame yourself for what Abigail chose to do," Will said gently. Reaching over, he grasped her left hand and squeezed. "She concealed it from you. From everyone. Her death is not your responsibility, Alana."

"It feels like it is," she whispered, her voice breaking on the last word, and tears rolled down her cheeks. "It feels heavy and suffocating, like water in my lungs and I can't- I have never failed a patient so spectacularly before."

Will held her hand and let her cry. The tears splashed on the table, on her sleeve, into the coffee that grew lukewarm.

*****

From his car, Hannibal raised a hand in farewell when Alana pulled out of the driveway. He was not pleased but not surprised to see her here, at Will's. Just as Will had turned to her for stability, so had she come to him for comfort. At least she had the good manners to recognize that Will belonged to another now.

The man himself was standing at the screen door, and gave Hannibal a firm hug once the doctor had put down his bags and case.

"I'm glad you're here," said Will sincerely.

Hannibal took Will by his jaw and pressed a kiss to soft lips. "I'm glad I'm here too."

Neither talked about Will's confession that afternoon in Jack's office. Instead they settled down for dinner that Hannibal finished up on Will's stove, and afterwards they lay together on Will's bed, the younger man curled into Hannibal's side, their hands linked, the lights turned off, and the house was full of a comforting quiet.

Chapter 11

It was at 4.25am when Will stirred awake. His and Hannibal's legs were tangled together and it was very hot under the covers, while the room itself was nearly freezing. They had forgotten to shut the window at the other end of the room. Carefully, he extricated himself and sat up, but his movements still woke Hannibal.

"Sorry," Will whispered, pressing a kiss to the other man's forehead when Hannibal grumbled under his breath, "gotta close the window."

"Mmmmph."

Will had to suppress a smile when the doctor slipped an arm around the younger man's middle and nuzzled in close. He was glad of this privilege, to see Hannibal this unguarded, when the whole world saw him gilded and shielded. He gently brushed Hannibal's hair from his forehead and wondered how he got so lucky.

Then he heard the growling from the other side of the room. Looking over, he saw that the dogs were all staring at him.

No.

They were staring in his direction.

Beth LeBeau. Dragged under her bed.

His heart rate picked up.

She peeled Ms LeBeau's face off because she thought that was a mask. Jack's voice.

She may think she's already dead. Hannibal.

She's a very sick young woman. And not sick in the psychopath sense, sick in the 'she needs serious medical attention pronto' sense. Zeller.

The only thing I could do - can do - is manage my expectations. Mrs Madchen.

The thoughts crashed into the forefront of his mind and then ebbed into a watchful silence, underscored by the growling of the dogs. Will licked the corner of his mouth and then shook Hannibal's shoulder, placing a finger on his lips before the doctor could speak.

Hannibal blinked the sleep out of his eyes.

Will slid down to lie next to Hannibal. He murmured soundlessly, "Someone's under the bed."

Hannibal's muscles tensed immediately. He pushed off the blanket and they sat up, as slowly as possible, before they exchanged a look.

Will nodded.

They got off the bed at the same time, Hannibal dragging Will further away towards the safety of the dogs. They both hunkered down and saw a face, heavy and pale, nearly mask-like, peering back at them.

Deep in those discolored eyes Will recognized fear and confusion.

"Georgia Madchen?" Will asked, shuffling closer on his hands and knees. "My name is Will Graham. He is Hannibal Lecter. You are Georgia Madchen, it is 4.25am, and you are alive in Wolf Trap, Virginia."

The young woman curled in further. "I-I'm alive?"

"Yes, you are." He stretched out his right hand. "Come out, Georgia. Please."

Will did not shy away when Georgia reached out to touch him. He felt Hannibal's hand behind his shoulder, and felt utterly safe.

*****

Hannibal watched as the young woman was loaded into a police car to be sent to the hospital for treatment. Will was on the phone with Jack, telling him to go straight to where Georgia Madchen was if he needed answers.

"She was under your bed?" one of the police officers who had responded to their call said. She had been taking down Hannibal's statement. "That's fucking freaky. Good thing you both kept your heads."

"Probably heard you guys fucking," commented her partner.

Hannibal looked at the man's tag. "Officer Riley Haldwell? I'd appreciate if you didn't use such language."

The officer stared at him and rolled his eyes, before walking away muttering about political correctness.

The one who was taking down Hannibal's statement apologized. "Haldwell's an as - an idiot. Sorry Mr Lecter - that's T-E-R, correct? - we'll be out of here soon and you both can go back to bed."

"Doctor Lecter, and yes, T-E-R." Hannibal managed a tired, charming half-smile, and then went to lead Will (still on the phone) back into the warmth of the house.

*****

*****

"So! You and Dr 'Sexy Plaid Suits' Lecter. When, where, and how. Spill," said Beverly, planting herself opposite Will the next day in his lecture hall. "Yes, I hunted you down to pry

into your personal affairs. Yes, I am a busybody. Yes, I want details. Now."

Will barely looked up from his notes. "I turned to him when I was feeling unstable, he helped me become stable, we got together after my stay at the hospital. That's all."

"Boo. That's not juicy at all."

"Good. Dull has been quite a rarefied element in my life recently."

"Anyway," said Beverly, "I'm not here just to tease you. Jack wants your report on what happened last night once you're done with lecturing, and Georgia Madchen says thanks."

Will looked up. "She's okay?"

"She doesn't remember killing Beth LeBeau, but she knows she did. I don't think she wants to remember."

"Some pains are best not remembered."

Beverly smiled crookedly, gaze soft with sympathy. "Alana said there won't be a funeral. A cremation, like her mom."

It hurt like a hammer to his chest. Will fought the lump in his throat and said, "She would like that. She'd never wanted to be her father's daughter."

"Did you know, before the letter?" asked Beverly.

"I didn't want to know."

Thankfully, Beverly let the matter drop after that. Will only hoped everyone else would.

*****

*****

One month passed with delightful dullness on the work front.

Will taught lectures, graded papers, and had most of his dinners at Hannibal's. On the weekends he read in the mornings, did the chores in the afternoons, and in the evenings Hannibal would come by. He had the piano tuned that first Saturday, and persuaded Will to play with him or for him a couple of times.

They had not had sex. Yet.

Will had had male bed partners before, and too often after they had got what they wanted, they left. It was irrational to think that Hannibal would do the same, but the fear clung on like soap scum.

They kissed, often, and they had used their hands on each other, but nothing beyond that. While his body enjoyed the release of sex, Will preferred to spend time with Hannibal, both

of them coexisting in the same space, filling up the loneliness with quiet companionship.

Perhaps Hannibal wanted them to move faster. Perhaps not.

Will trusted that Hannibal would let him know; the man was fairly open about his life before Baltimore, sharing small details and stories of his childhood while they curled together on the bed, huddled for warmth. In return Will had been just as honest, dredging up old memories of his father in the dockyard: smoking a Marlboro, repairing a greasy engine with his faded green baseball cap pulled low over his eyes, humming some half-remembered tune from the radio.

It was selfish, maybe, but Will wanted this emotional intimacy with Hannibal to last forever. It was something of the older man's that now belonged to Will. He had never considered himself a possessive or selfish man, but he wanted to keep Hannibal close and *his*.

He wanted no one else to see this side of Hannibal, ever. Even the lovers Hannibal had had before him - Will felt hot rage bloom in his gut when he imagined them, laughing and joking with Hannibal, touching him, *kissing him*- Will never thought he could be a jealous man.

Turned out he had merely not met the right man to be jealous over.

Will did not want to name what he felt for Hannibal. If he named it, he would have expectations, and once there were expectations, there would be disappointment.

Will wasn't sure he could handle that.

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

On Saturday afternoon, Will took his dogs out for a long walk over the frosty landscape. He had been to see Georgia Madchen the day before. She was healing slowly. Instead of talking about the LeBeau case, he had asked about her progress and told her she was pretty, and she had smiled. She had then asked about Hannibal - not by name, but "the guy who was behind you, the one who moved like a lion" - and he had stammered and stuttered a vague response. It made him blush even now, that momentary fluster that had exploded in his gut.

Tossing an old tennis ball for the dogs to chase after, he luxuriated in the rare feeling of being free to do as he wanted. Too often for the past few months he had been called to crime scenes or been stuck in a hospital bed. The past month he had slowly detached himself from the grief of Abigail's passing. The sorrow and regret would linger for some time yet, but Will was starting to *live*.

it was quiet all around him. This was heaven.

Or, he amended privately, it used to be his idea of heaven until recently. Now solitude felt less of a respite and more of a delay before the delight of companionship.

Companionship of a specific companion.

Is this how it's supposed to be? Simply by having the right person by your side? Will threw the tennis ball as hard as he could, and it described an elegant arc against the pale sky. Buster led the chase after it, the rest hurtling madly after him. He watched them bounding after their toy.

Perhaps it really was that simple.

*****

When Will got home, he couldn't stop the broad smile that spread over his face and the warmth that bloomed inside his heart. Hannibal's car was parked outside, two hours before he was expected. As he went in, he heard bustling in the kitchen. *Of course.* Leaving the dogs to their water bowls, he shrugged out of his jacket and hung it next to Hannibal's, and for a second his fingers brushed the doctor's coat, which was a few times more expensive than Will's. For a second his touch lingered. Then he went in search of Hannibal.

"Hey," he said as he entered the kitchen. "You're early."

Hannibal looked up. He was not in his suit; instead he had on a pair of black slacks and a russet brown cable-knit sweater. Charmingly casual. He had just trussed up a fair-sized duck for the oven. His gaze was fond and welcoming. "Hello, Will. I missed you."

Will stepped around the counter and kissed Hannibal on the lips. "I missed you too. I'm glad you're home."

There was a sudden glimmer in Hannibal's red-brown eyes. The older man dipped his head and kissed Will again, slow and gentle, carefully coaxing Will to open his mouth, even while he kept his hands on their dinner. An anticipatory energy pulsated between them. Will could feel it in his pulse, in their mingled breathing, in the molecules dancing between them. He sank into the kiss gladly.

It took a few moments before Will realized what he had said earlier. "I-I meant..."

Hannibal pulled away from the kiss with a soft smile. "I'm glad to be home too."

Simultaneously embarrassed and deeply pleased, Will swallowed the rush of emotion and muttered something about showering. He pressed one more quick kiss to Hannibal's jaw and darted away.

*****

Hannibal watched Will go and then set the duck into the oven.

Strange to think that when they first met, Will had been stand-offish to the point of rudeness; Hannibal had been intrigued by the potential of that incredible empathetic mind, but he did contemplate boiling that same brain as a herbal supplement. He had put aside that thought when Will shot Garrett Jacob Hobbs. Then, Hannibal only wanted to explore the shadows in Will's mind. To wind him up, watch him go. See him wrought beautiful destruction and mayhem, far and away better than any paltry killer could hope to attain.

Now he wanted absolute possession of Will Graham.

What was once detached interest had grown into desire, and was now a certainty in Hannibal's mind.

He would have Will as his lover and life partner.

If Will desired otherwise, Hannibal would honor every part of him.

*****

Will took a long, hot shower. By now Hannibal had replaced all of Will's shower gel and shampoo, saying that these were better for the environment and for his skin and hair. Privately, Will believed that Hannibal was just irritated by the chemical scents of his drugstore shower gel and shampoo.

There is no part of Will's life that didn't have Hannibal's influence now.

It should have been a frightening thought, yet it was almost comforting. It felt like Hannibal was investing in this relationship, to want to impose his design on Will's life. It felt like Hannibal *cared*.

The Will Graham of six months ago would have fled like a startled deer from such attention. That Will Graham would have closed every door in Hannibal's face.

He swiped across the mirror, leaving a streak of condensation-free glass, and looked himself in the eyes.

That Will Graham was not *this* Will Graham. Not this one whose heart pounded with epiphany and whose gaze was rich with yearning.

*****

When Will emerged from the shower and came down the stairs, Hannibal was already ensconced in an armchair, reading his tablet. Three of the dogs lay about his feet, the others lounging in their own beds. Every so often Hannibal would absently reach down to scratch behind Winston's ears. There was a savory scent in the air. The light outside the house was beginning to turn to gold, and Will could sense no shadow in his mind ready to plague him.

It was hard to picture a moment more perfect than this.

"Hannibal?"

The older man looked up and a smile spread over his face, a genuine smile that made the corners of his eyes crinkle and the years fall off him. He put aside the tablet and unfolded from the armchair, striding purposefully to Will. His gaze locked on the younger man's shaven jaw and the warmth darkened into desire.

Clad only in an old blue bathrobe, Will felt more exposed than if he were completely naked. He licked his lips and asked, "Do you have to keep an eye on dinner?"

"Not really," Hannibal said quietly, sliding his large, skilled hands under the robe and putting them on Will's hips. "It will be another hour before it's done."

"Good." Will draped his arms over Hannibal's shoulders and nuzzled into his neck. "Do you want to?"

"Now?" Hannibal's hands skated over Will's flank and squeezed his ass.

Will breathed a laugh. "Now." He nosed the doctor's ear. "I got our results back. We're both clean."

The shiver that ran through Hannibal told Will more than words ever could. Will pressed closer, letting Hannibal feel his arousal, and whispered, "I've set up the spare room upstairs. Fresh sheets. No dogs."

With a rumbling growl Hannibal swept Will up in his arms. Will laughed with astonished delight. He knew Hannibal was strong, but he hadn't expected his lover to be this strong. Thrills danced down his spine as he imagined Hannibal pinning him down with all this heavy muscle, and he grew harder. As Hannibal set him down on the spare bed, he grabbed Hannibal's bicep.

"I've not done this for almost fifteen years," Will confessed. "Not sure how to proceed right now."

Hannibal nipped at Will's lips. "How would you want this to proceed?"

Heart hammering in his chest, Will said, "I want to fuck you. If that's okay with you."

"it is certainly okay with me." Hannibal pushed Will down to lie on his back, before stepping back to peel out of his clothes. "But I get to decide how."

Chapter End Notes

next chapter: sexy times :)

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

yes, it's the sex :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will grinned as he watched Hannibal straddle him. He slid his hands up and down Hannibal's thighs, savoring the feel of all that muscle, and said, "So I'm supposed to just lie back and take it?"

"No," said Hannibal, leaning down to capture Will's smiling mouth in a kiss. He murmured, "You're supposed to lie back and - how do they say it? - *give it to me.*"

Will groaned and grabbed Hannibal's face, deepening the kiss in an almost primal manner. He dragged his teeth over the older man's lower lip, dove into his mouth, sucked hungrily on his tongue. The last time he had had sex with a man, he had not even been present mentally; he had let his partner take what he wanted and they had said their goodbyes. Now he was completely focused on this moment, with Hannibal's weight a welcome reminder of their *this*, their something indefinable, their something more than just a romance.

"I can feel you thinking," said Hannibal, scratching his stubble along Will's jaw. "How can I make you stop?"

"Kiss me," Will demanded, unused to demanding for affection and his tone more aggressive for it.

Hannibal obliged gladly, even as he rolled his hips against Will's, their erections brushing over each other's stomachs. Will could not help the whine in his throat when Hannibal pushed him down and straightened. Licking his reddened lips, Hannibal ran a hand through his hair and asked, "Would you like to prepare me, or would you prefer to watch? And, if you don't mind, the lubricant please."

Will's mouth went dry. His left hand reached out blindly to the side to scrabble for the lube; his right gripped Hannibal's thigh so tightly, he wondered if he would leave bruises, and at the thought a surge of dark heat shot through him. He had enjoyed them giving each other handjobs, and he was apprehensive earlier, but now he wanted, he craved, so much, to be inside Hannibal, to *have* him. To *claim* him.

"Let me," he managed. He rolled them over when he grabbed hold of the lubricant and squirted a generous handful into his palm. Hannibal spread his legs willingly, curling his right around Will to dig his heel into Will's back. Will kissed Hannibal's left knee and took a moment to admire the older man. Broad, hairy chest, with a neat trail leading down; a

belly slightly soft from rich food, a largely sedentary lifestyle, and age; hooded gaze that bore amusement and arousal; his erect cock, stiff and proud, curving slightly to the left.

Will licked his lips again. "How did I get so lucky?"

Rather than wait for a response, he got to work. His slick hand rubbed over Hannibal's erection, now a wonderfully familiar sensation, and then teased down and behind. Hannibal watched his face all the time, his wide mouth barely parted to breathe; when Will began nudging at his entrance, Hannibal shifted so his left knee could drape over Will's shoulder. The younger man swallowed at this display of vulnerability and trust. He slipped in the first finger, one knuckle deep, and worked slowly into the second knuckle.

"That okay?" he breathed against the inside of Hannibal's knee.

"You don't have to be that careful."

"How long has it been for you?"

"With another partner? Years." With his leg, Hannibal pulled Will closer. "It doesn't matter. I want to feel this."

Emboldened, the younger man took Hannibal at his word and pushed another finger in without warning; the sound Hannibal made would fuel his fantasies for a long time. He wanted to hear it again, immediately, he wanted to hear it repeated every day of his life. The need to have this was surprising, but Will would think about that later.

*****

Hannibal dug his fingers into the pillow even as he spread his legs wider. He seldom took the receptive role, but watching Will's wide eyes and hungry look was worth the discomfort.

Two fingers, then more lubricant and then three, and Will adjusted the angle of his hand and Hannibal's vision whited out for a split second. He caught his lower lip between his teeth, a gasp trapped in his throat. Will's gaze darkened.

"That?"

"That, yes."

Will's tongue peeked out between his lips. He was merciless as he opened Hannibal up, and with every twist of his wrist and thrust of his fingers, Hannibal felt his ironclad control falling away. Blindly he reached up to grab Will by the back of his neck, tugging the younger man down for a messy kiss.

"Enough," he snarled, the words trapped in the hot breath they shared. He rolled them over so that Will now lay beneath him. Hannibal's lips curved in a snarl and his hair had fallen free of its usual neatness. Beneath him... perfection.

Wild, dark curls, kiss-swollen mouth, cheeks pink with arousal and anticipation, goosebumps prickling over flushed skin covered with a sheen of perspiration. Hannibal wanted to keep

Will like this forever, open and wanting.

Chest heaving, Hannibal licked the salt from Will's neck and then buried his nose beneath Will's ear, tongued at the hollow behind it. Will laughed and tried to wiggle away, so Hannibal pinned the younger man's wrists to the bed. "Stay still."

"Then don't tickle me," Will said. He struggled briefly and subsided when Hannibal's grip didn't relax. "I should be worried about how much I like that."

"A heretofore undiscovered kink?" asked Hannibal, scattering open-mouthed kisses across his lover's chest. He trailed his fingers down Will's arms and along his sides, while he rocked back up to sit lightly on his heels.

The bed was not as firm as Hannibal liked it, and its springs creaked alarmingly when he adjusted his posture. He retrieved the tube of lubricant and slicked up Will's erection, earning a hitched gasp from the younger man. Then, with a sigh, Hannibal slowly guided Will into himself.

*****

Will's hands flew to grip Hannibal's hips as the older man sank down, impossibly slow and elegant and sensual. Bare, he was going in bare but for the lube, their first time together and Hannibal was so trusting and sexy-

"Oh god, Hannibal, god you feel so good." Will could not keep the words to himself, the sensation of sliding into Hannibal loosening his capacity to think rationally. "I want - let me-
"

"No," Hannibal warned, his accent thicker than usual. He threw his head back and inhaled, exhaled, his chest and belly heaving, before he pushed his hips down until he was fully seated, forcing a long groan to ripple out of his throat. Will watched Hannibal swallow convulsively, his upper lip curling and showing sharp teeth.

He looked like a wild animal, an apex predator, and he was *Will's*.

When Hannibal began to roll his hips experimentally, Will felt his own control fray. He surged up, pulling Hannibal on top of him, and then rolled them over again. Hannibal almost protested, but Will pulled out and growled, "On your knees. Now."

"As you wish." Hannibal smiled at him and obeyed, baring himself like a prize. Will licked up the line of Hannibal's spine as far up as he could reach as he pushed once again into that welcome, tight heat. His right hand curved possessively over Hannibal's hip, and his left took Hannibal's cock in hand to stroke in time to Will's thrusts.

"Will," Hannibal moaned, voice broken and feral. "Will, harder, *please*."

The younger man sucked on Hannibal's shoulder and complied. The sounds they made drowned out all other possible noise in Will's head: he could hear the obscene glide of his

cock, the slap of wet flesh on flesh, the increasingly desperate and guttural groans Hannibal made.

Will shifted so he was draped over Hannibal and then he wrenched the older man's jaw to face him. "If you- if you ever let anyone else, *anyone else*, see you like this, *fuck you like this,* I swear I will find him and tear him apart. I will, I swear to God, I will rip him into a million fucking piece, and then I'll kill you." He kissed Hannibal, hard, tearing his lip with his teeth accidentally. "You're mine. You are mine, I don't care how selfish that is, you are. You're mine."

"Yours," Hannibal gasped. "Yours. Please, Will."

My Hannibal, Will thought savagely, and pounded into his lover with mindless fervor. He came with a shout, muffled into Hannibal's skin, and took a couple of deep breaths before he pulled out again. If Hannibal complained, Will didn't hear; he gave in to the impulse and pressed his mouth to his lover's entrance.

*****

Hannibal wasn't unused to being rimmed, but Will went at it with a passion that not even Hannibal's most skilled partner had possessed. Will's tongue slipped into Hannibal without hesitation. Hannibal found himself pressing his face to the pillow, grasping blindly at the bedding, his thoughts in complete disarray. He could not keep his voice down, and when was the last time anyone made him this vocal?

Behind him, Will was still stroking his erection and his tongue thrusting in and out slickly. Hannibal felt the tremors build in his legs and deep in his gut, and squeezed his eyes shut to picture Will right now. Possessive, demanding, forceful Will, the same Will that kicked down the Hobbs' door and fired off ten shots, the same Will that faced down monsters like Hannibal on a regular basis. Will's thumbnail scratched lightly over the head of his erection and Hannibal's body surged into climax. His vision and mind blurred into static, while his body rode out the sensations pulsing through him.

The last thing he remembered was Will rolling him to his side, kissing his cheek, murmuring something too soft for Hannibal to hear.

*****

When he finally woke up, Will was carefully wiping him down with a warm, damp towel. There was a strange light in Will's blue eyes, something more than affection, deeper than desire.

"Will?"

"Hannibal," said Will quietly, and dropped the cloth to the side. He climbed into bed and snuggled close to the older man. As he settled in, cheek pressed to chest, he said, "I've turned off the oven, the duck will keep warm in it."

"Good. Thank you."

"Everything feels different."

"Sharper and brighter," Hannibal said. He finger-combed Will's stubborn curls from his eyes. "That was much more intense than I thought it would be."

"Yeah?"

"You are amazing." Hannibal leaned in and kissed Will, tasting toothpaste and barely a hint of their combined musk. He pulled away with a mild look of displeasure. "Next time, kiss me before you wash out your mouth."

Will frowned, but his mouth was still curved in a smile. "I stuck my tongue up your ass, Hannibal. Not everyone likes to taste that. And you with your heightened taste buds..."

"All the better to remember this with," said Hannibal, quiet reverence in his voice as he ran his fingers down Will's arm, tracing a few scrapes and nicks. "Scent and taste are among the most powerful memory triggers."

Will laughed softly and nuzzled his jaw. "Next time."

They lay there, wrapped about each other. Hannibal felt his memory palace clicking back into place, except there was this room now, and this bed, and the sight and feel and sound of Will Graham within it. The space heater hummed and filled the comforting silence.

"I was certainly not expecting that," said Hannibal.

"That makes two of us."

"You are certainly more possessive than I thought you capable of."

"Oh." Will peered up. "That's... that's what you're talking about?"

Hannibal kissed the tip of his lover's nose. "Yes. And I *was* surprised that you - how did you put it? - stuck your tongue up my ass." He kissed Will again. "I liked it."

Settling down again, Will huffed in amusement, and then an embarrassed flush crept over his skin. "That was pretty obvious. But my, um, possessiveness... I don't, I don't own things. Or people. I don't have people, you know I don't seek attachments to people."

"Fear of disappointment and abandonment."

"Yes."

"Yet you want me, Will." Hannibal brushed a knuckle over Will's cheek. "I am yours. But you think that's selfish."

"I want you to be part of my life," Will whispered. He shut his eyes, lashes fanning out beautifully. "It *is* selfish, because I don't deserve you, but I want you. I want to keep you."

Tenderly, Hannibal pressed kisses to each closed eye, and murmured, "Keep me for as long as you want me. You and I deserve each other, Will."

"We do?"

"Yes. I am yours." Hannibal tucked Will under his chin and wrapped his legs about the younger man. His hand rested on the back of Will's neck; two fingers kneaded into the base of Will's skull. "I'm yours as much as you're mine."

Chapter End Notes

hold on to your hats now - you are gonna HATE me in the next chapter >:)

Chapter 14

They made love again in the wee hours of the morning, roused by need. They were using the upstairs bedroom, away from the dogs. There was no need to fear when there were two of them, and the room felt like a sanctuary even as Hannibal reached around him and into him. The empty spaces of the house filled with warm noise, quiet scents; Will tugged the blanket over their heads so they were cocooned in a moist, lustful heat, and felt himself sanctified by Hannibal's desire.

Hannibal fucked Will slowly beneath the sheets. Will could picture it: Hannibal's shadowy form undulating and rippling over him, a great heaving beast in the darkness. Will was used to being afraid of the darkness in his mind, but right then and there, the darkness was Hannibal, the shadows were Hannibal, the heat and hunger all Hannibal.

Will never felt more at home in his entire life.

When his climax swept him up, Will closed his eyes and opened his mouth, gasping Hannibal's name in a prayer, his fingers scraping down the sides of the older man's arms as his thighs clamped tight to keep that welcome intrusion in, feel every pounding thrust echo through his frame. He heard Hannibal's heavier breathing and the choked-off snarl, felt the tensing of abdominal muscles and the sudden, timeless pause, before Hannibal growled his name against his lips and surged into him.

*****

The morning was sweetly domestic. Will couldn't keep his hands off Hannibal as the older man made breakfast - pancakes - and was shooed off to exercise the dogs so he would stay out of the way. Will himself could not explain his clingy behavior. He supposed it was because they had finally had sex, and his hormones were hard at work. Whatever the reason, he was in an unusually light mood as he threw tennis balls for his dogs.

He still had some reservations about the physical aspect of their relationship. While it was true that he had been sleeping better with Hannibal in the same bed, and that he enjoyed sex with Hannibal, what happened when either of them wanted distance? It was necessary for their work. Hannibal dealt with neuroses all day, and was used to a solitary life. Will dealt with the darker aspects of human psychology all day, and solitude allowed him to disperse the tension and shadows.

Maybe they would learn to compromise. Of all his partners, Will thought that Hannibal was the most likely to forgive his snappishness when he was stressed, to understand when he needed to *not talk*, to appreciate that he needed companionship far more than company. Will found himself smiling tenderly whenever he thought of his lover's name. That was new.

A pickup truck drove up to the house slowly, distracting Will from his thoughts. Two German Shepherds were in the back, and when the vehicle rolled to a stop, Will's pack bounded around to the back to bark happily at the visitors. Will hopped down the two steps and strode to meet his elderly neighbor, Mrs Henderson. "Good morning."

"Morning, Will." She shushed the dogs in her smoke-edged voice and Will went to help her let her German Shepherds down to join the pack. "I found some of your mail in my barn when I was cleaning out yesterday. Mailmen must've dropped them off wrong and Duchess prob'ly stuck them under there. Hope there was nothing too pressing."

Will hunkered down to scratch behind Duchess's ears. "You didn't mean it, did you? You didn't mean to steal my mail, you little federal offender," he asked the dog affectionately. Duchess woofed and grinned doggishly. Duke nosed at Will for some petting and Will gave it to him as he said to Mrs Henderson, "I doubt it. You're going to Florida today?"

"Yes, Tim will pick me up in an hour and send me to the airport. I figured I oughta drop my two off before then. You can always pick up kibble from my barn, if you need."

"Thanks, Mrs Henderson." Will stood up and took the letters from her age-marked hands. For a seventy-six-year-old, Mrs Henderson was still hale and hearty, and could probably drink Will under the table. Will didn't call on her for favors often unless he had dog troubles; Mrs Henderson had taken in strays for decades, and knew dogs better than she knew people.

She clicked her tongue and her two immediately abandoned the other dogs to sit with her. As she scratched their heads, she pointed at Will's front door with her chin. "That your young man?"

Will glanced over his shoulder. Hannibal was standing there, in a light tan sweater and sleep pants, looking completely at ease and at home. That sent a sweet, sharp pang resonating through Will. "He's not that young," said Will, fighting down the urge to blush.

Mrs Henderson snorted. "At my age, everyone is young. He's a handsome one. Not a dog person."

"No, he's okay with them." Will frowned as he parsed the tone. "You don't mean whether he likes dogs."

"I meant he looks like he's one who prefers independence. A cat person. A large cat. Maybe a lion." Mrs Henderson raised a hand in greeting to Hannibal, and then clapped Will on the shoulder. Her hand was as hard as teak. "And you are a wolf, in case you were wondering. You two be safe now."

Will thanked his neighbor again, wishing her bon voyage, and watched her pickup truck wend its way out of sight.

*****

Hannibal watched the entire interaction unfold from the porch. Behind him, the warmth of hearth and home; before him the wind was beginning to bite. Hannibal could almost taste snow. Last evening he had given and this morning he had taken; it felt as if a momentous chasm had been crossed, for them both. A pleasant ache radiated from the tail of his spine, and his limbs were loose and relaxed.

Will left the dogs to their own devices as they sniffed and romped with the two newcomers, and came back into the house to press close to Hannibal. "You're a lion."

"Hmm?"

"Mrs Henderson. She said you were a cat person. A lion," Will teased, nipping kisses over Hannibal's smiling mouth. "And I am a wolf."

"Two fearsome predators."

"Mmm hmm. You know," Will said as he snaked his arms around Hannibal's waist, "for a fearsome predator, you don't strike me as being particularly scary."

Hannibal smiled and nuzzled Will's temple. "Perhaps that's because I have yet to show you my fangs." He licked the outside of Will's ear and nibbled on the lobe.

Will felt arousal pool low in his gut. "I'm not edible."

"Not yet, but I'll try to eat you all up later." Hannibal brushed his lips over Will's. "And I know exactly where I want to begin devouring you."

That drew a low moan from Will. They kissed languidly, still basking in the glow of their early-morning coupling. Then Will stepped away and tossed the handful of mail onto the table. He took a seat and thanked Hannibal for the coffee he offered, even though the cup was already less than piping hot from the time Will spent outside with the dogs and Mrs Hendersen. The pancakes he left aside for after coffee.

Hannibal stood behind him, one hand laid over his lover's heart. Any excuse to feel Will leaning against him. This was a perfect, golden moment: coffee and breakfast, the dogs playing outside, fine weather and homely warmth. Will put aside the empty coffee mug and hung onto Hannibal's hand on his chest, his free hand reaching out to sort through the late mail.

"Bill, bill, journal, bill... wait." The young man stopped.

There was a pale blue envelope, and on it Will's address. Hannibal recognized Abigail's handwriting. He stayed still and felt the hammering of Will's heart beneath his thin shirt, listened to the sudden stop and start of his breathing. He murmured, "That is postmarked two days before she killed herself."

"She... I don't... Stay with me, Hannibal. I don't know if I could read..." Will stared at the envelope as though it would explode. Then, carefully, he pulled it towards him, and opened it.

*****

'Dear Will,

Hannibal said he and you were starting to date, and that he can't hide secrets from you. He told me to be honest with you, and maybe you will help me too.

I'm sorry. I was the lure. I lured the girls for Dad, and I knew what he was doing, but I was so afraid that I couldn't stop him. If I stopped him killing those girls, then he would have killed me. I also killed Nicholas Boyle. It was an accident, I swear it was an accident, but I gutted him. He won't get out of my mind and I don't know if I can live like this, always haunted by their voices.

If you think you can forgive me, please call me. I need to know you can forgive me and that you can help me. I understand if you can't. If I were you I probably wouldn't be able to either. I don't know. I think it's better if I go, but I don't know if I want to go because you saved me and I don't want to die. I didn't want to die and I don't want to die but I'm so scared.

I can't call you because they listen to the phones, and I don't know if I can look you in the eye and tell you all this. I'm sorry, I'm really really sorry.

In case you never call, in case I don't get to see you before, I need to tell you something else very important. I need you to believe me. You must believe me.

Hannibal was the man on the phone.

From Abigail'

*****

It is remarkable how the human brain responds to times of duress. It takes in all the stimuli around it, as much as possible, a last-ditch attempt to find a way to escape from the danger.

Will could still taste the bitter-richness of coffee. He could hear his dogs barking. He could smell the butter on the pancakes piled high on a plate. He could feel the firm presence of his lover behind him. The colors were bright and sharp. He could practically feel the ebb-flow of his blood throughout his body. Every hair. Every cell.

In his hands, the paper with the words that Abigail wrote. One sheet of paper that threatened to tear down his entire world.

His mind was static and electric, all at once. A million thoughts and none at all.

Hannibal's hand remained exactly where it was, placed over Will's heart, and over the deafening roar of denial in his ears, Will heard Hannibal say, "Well now. I did not expect that from Abigail. What are you going to do, Will?"

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal was proud that Abigail had been cunning enough to retaliate, even in her desperation. With his left hand still draped over Will's chest, he plucked the letter from his lover's loose grip. She had been worried to tears when Hannibal raised the topic. To think she had thought of this... Were she still alive, he would have congratulated her for dealing her trump card so well.

"Hannibal?"

"Yes, Will?"

"Aren't you going to say anything?"

"What would you like me to say?" Hannibal let the letter float to the table and instead combed his right hand through Will's wayward curls.

Will lurched out of his caress, turning around to stare at him. His chest was heaving and his gaze wild and hurt; Hannibal felt a surge of emotion at witnessing his lover's beautiful distress. He watched as Will fought for control over the myriad emotions flooding him; he displayed pain so exquisitely, every fiber of his being struggling to deny what had been presented.

"What Abigail wrote. Is that true?" he demanded, voice quiet and hoarse.

Hannibal blinked slowly. "Yes. I was the man on the phone."

Inhaling sharply, Will covered his mouth. He looked pale and about to be sick. Hannibal's confession was beyond that simple phone call, they both knew this; Hannibal was confessing to being the Copycat. Will shuddered again, his eyes bright with agony. Hannibal ached to go to the younger man, pull him into his arms to breathe in the pain that must wrack him, all the heartache and rage and confusion. All the emotions that Hannibal had locked away ever since Mischa.

With a sudden, wild cry, Will swept the letters, pancakes and coffee mug off the table. The smashing of crockery did little to perturb Hannibal. He watched as tears glimmered in his lover's eyes and wished he could taste the bitter-salt of them on his tongue. The warm, homey scent of butter and syrup colored the scene in gold. Will's features twisted, grimaced, crumpled.

"Hannibal. Lie to me," Will said. *Begged*. "Please lie to me. I need you to lie. Right now. Tell me a lie."

The older man took a step forward and took Will's limp hand. He kissed the knuckles and pressed Will's palm to his cheek so Will had to look at him.

"This has all been a game," said Hannibal. "I only wanted to see what you would do. To wind you up, and watch you go."

The shimmer of hurt betrayal flashed like a blade in blue-gray eyes. Will's breath caught and stuttered.

Hannibal tenderly kissed the heel of Will's hand. "I have never loved you."

"No," Will breathed out. He tore his hand away. "Don't. You don't. You don't get to do this - you don't... God." He shielded his eyes and sat down heavily on the chair he abandoned earlier. "You don't get to do this, Hannibal. Not like this."

The doctor waited.

Eventually Will shook his head and stood up, turning away to stare out the window. "Why didn't you just kill me? You could've. All this time, I've been in your company, unguarded and unsuspecting."

"I have no desire to kill you. And I am no longer lying."

"I know you aren't lying," hissed Will. His hands clench into fists. "You didn't lie to me, you've never lied to me, all along - and I too blind, too blind to see it..." He paced the room, erratic and lost in thought, as though all the fury and confusion wired into his cells needed to be used up. His hands brushed over the table, the countertop, the knife block. One of Will's dogs came into the kitchen and happily gobbled up the pancakes all by herself, licking the linoleum clean of syrup and butter.

Hannibal thought of butterflies in jars, waiting to be gassed.

Will didn't even notice the animal. "And you had a desire to kill Cassie Boyle? Marissa Schurr? Those - those were experienced kills, they weren't your first..."

Comprehension dawned. The younger man shuddered and grasped his elbows, as though he was about to shiver out of his skin. He gulped and slowly sank to the floor, his shoulders shaking as he tried to calm himself.

Hannibal went around the counter and hunkered down to see his lover eye to eye, except Will had squeezed his eyes shut. "Will? Look at me."

Will shook his head. "You're not just the Copycat. You're more. You... you elevated them to *art.*"

The doctor felt an odd pleasure spread golden-white through him. *Remarkable boy.* "Who am I, Will?"

"The Chesapeake Ripper," Will whispered soundlessly. He finally opened his eyes and looked at Hannibal bleakly. "You're the Chesapeake Ripper."

*****

If Will could reverse time, he would. Turn back the clock six months ago, to last week, to yesterday afternoon when he made love to Hannibal for the first time, when he felt loved and accepted for who he was. To the wee hours of this morning when Hannibal had claimed him in quiet want, cradling him close afterwards and calling him beautiful and strong. To fifteen minutes ago, when he had looked at Hannibal in his doorway looking like he belonged there.

And now Will could not escape the knowledge. The Chesapeake Ripper was Hannibal, and Hannibal was the Chesapeake Ripper, and both of them had taken up residence in Will's mind and heart so thoroughly he would never be able to get rid of them.

Hannibal was regarding him with a mixture of concern, pride, and that strange look of otherness that Will had glimpsed before, in Dr Sutcliffe's office. When Hannibal looked at Will not as a person but as a subject to be studied, something not of the same species as Hannibal himself.

When Hannibal's hand brushed his cheek, Will wished he flinched away. Instead he leaned into the caress, leaned into it and hated the comfort the contact brought. Hannibal cupped the back of Will's neck and carefully pulled him into his embrace, with Will's head tucked into the hollow between Hannibal's neck and shoulder. It was peaceful and warm and loving, everything Will wished it wasn't.

"Remarkable boy," said Hannibal, his voice rumbling like low thunder in his chest. "My beautiful, brilliant Will."

"Are you going to kill me?" Will asked. He felt numbed, suddenly, as though the epiphany of who Hannibal Lecter really was drained him of every ounce of strength. With a sigh, he curled closer, one hand grasping the soft sweater over Hannibal's heart. He remembered how he had listened to it beating: slow, steady, strong. He put his ear there now, and it was the same.

Hannibal was bedrock.

The older man smoothed Will's hair from his brow and kissed the top of his head. "I have no intention to kill you, Will."

"That what do you want with me?"

Hannibal hesitated. "Come with me. Let me show you art. See what I see."

Will smiled and closed his eyes. "Do you know what I see when I look at you?"

*****

With a simple sentence, Abigail had wrought destruction on what Hannibal would give nearly everything to preserve. She had finally proven herself. Hannibal wondered what kind of hunter she would have been, were she to have chosen life instead of death. In time and with his training, she would have been even better than Hannibal himself.

The world lost an artist.

He stroked Will's silky curls, down the elegant line of Will's spine. "What do you see when you look at me, Will? A monster, perhaps? Black with blood and inhuman?"

"I wish." Will sat up, away from Hannibal's hold. He stared at the doctor sadly. "I look at you and I see the man I love."

Chapter End Notes

i think there should be one or two more chapters before i close this fic. Thanks for your kudos and reviews!

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal placed his palm on Will's barely-stubbled cheek, feeling the younger man lean into the touch like a surrender. With his other hand cupping the back of Will's skull, he gently drew his lover close, brushed his lips over his unresisting mouth, and murmured, "Come away with me. Leave all this behind."

He had not intended to say that. After all, he had built a life here through hard work, built a life and a reputation and a home that was intimately molded to his preference. But Abigail's reveal had ripped it all apart. There was no way he could continue to operate in Baltimore under his name. Not with Will aware of his other identity.

If he killed Will now, he would buy himself time enough to secure tickets out of the country and find himself new hunting ground. It would be so easy: he just had to grip and twist.

He had done it dozens of times. It would be so easy.

And yet.

And yet.

He pressed a kiss into Will's cheek, under his ear, into his hair. "Come away with me, Will. Come with me, let me show you the world. See the world by my side."

Will trembled and turned his face, seeking Hannibal's mouth. The kiss that he initiated was frenetic and desperate, reeking of fear and despair and ferocious want, nearly overwhelming Hannibal's precise control. He clutched Will, even as Will surged to his knees and held Hannibal by his face. Will kissed with teeth raking over Hannibal's lower lip, with tongue thrusting in to drink in as much of Hannibal as possible, as though he was trying to shut out all thought in his head.

They tipped over, Will sprawling over Hannibal. The kiss deepened and intensified. Will braced himself on his hands and shifted, adjusting the angle of the kiss. His left hand scratched over Hannibal's shirt; the other remained on the floor.

When Will shifted his weight again, the psychiatrist suddenly rolled them over and grabbed Will's wrist, slamming it hard on the floor. Once. Twice. Three times. Will tightened his hold on the shard from the broken plate. His fingers bled.

*****

Even from the very first slam, Will could feel the impact jar his entire forearm. Hannibal's thumb dug into his wrist and the profiler could no longer maintain his grip. The shard of broken ceramic dropped from his hand.

Hannibal did not speak. He didn't even appear upset. He kept Will pinned beneath him, his eyes unfathomably dark and emotionless.

Shark's eyes, Will thought. *The eyes of the thing that is the Chesapeake Ripper.*

Funny. I'd never thought it would end like this.

He reared up and forward to headbutt Hannibal; he heard the crunch of cartilage giving way and the grunt of pain. Hannibal's grip relaxed for just that instant and Will pulled away. He shoved Hannibal off of him and scrambled for the living room, for his service revolver - he could hear Hannibal getting to his feet - he reached into his bag and tore it out, flipping off the safety and swinging around to point it at his lover. At the Chesapeake Ripper.

The doctor's nose and lips were bloody. He stood at the doorway between the living room and the kitchen. Will saw that he had a knife in his hand. *Surgical precision.*

"Hannibal," said Will, training his sight on the other man. He swallowed, his throat thick with unease. His right hand was slick with blood from the broken plate earlier. "Please, Hannibal. I don't want to shoot you."

Hannibal was not trying to duck or make himself a smaller target. If anything, he raised his chin slightly in defiance and squared his shoulders. "And I don't want to kill you."

"And yet."

"And yet."

Will licked his upper lip, trying to get his racing heartbeat to slow. "I can't let this go."

The dogs whimpered and gathered around the space heater.

"No," said Hannibal, a faint regret coloring his voice, "if you did, you wouldn't be Will Graham." He let his hands drop to his side and took a deep breath.

"What are you doing?" asked Will.

"You can kill the Chesapeake Ripper." Hannibal gazed at Will, and let the younger man see all the yearning Hannibal had for him.

Will raised the gun. He swallowed. "Hannibal-"

"Go on."

A heartbeat. Two.

Five.

Ten.

Fifteen.

Will's hand trembled.

He suddenly squeezed the trigger. The gunshot was deafening.

*****

There is a beauty in a deadly weapon. The clean lines of a well-made gun, for instance, and its apparent simplicity in design to contain an explosive charge made when the trigger starts the near-instantaneous chain reaction.

Fire, sparks, motion, speed, sound.

It is a poetry written in potential released, often ending with a stanza of blood and pain and sometimes death.

*****

The dogs fled out the door in a furry rush.

Hannibal barely flinched when the gun was fired. When the sound and its echoes died away, he glanced at the hole in the wall, a good five or six inches from his head, and then turned to regard Will solemnly.

"A little wide," said the doctor.

Will still had the gun in his hand, but he was no longer aiming the weapon at Hannibal. Instead his hands hung limply at his sides. He licked his lips and tossed the gun aside; it landed on the floor and skidded under the camp bed.

Cautiously swiping away the blood from his lip, Hannibal studied Will. "Why didn't you kill me?"

"Why didn't *you?"* Will snapped in reply. He inhaled sharply, his jaw working as he fought for control. The expression on his face hardened. "Was it fun, watching me fall for you? Every... every damn move, *everything* you did was meticulous and planned, orchestrated... You never left a clue at the crime scenes - God, those crime scenes - was I to be one of them?"

"You are not one of them," Hannibal stated calmly. "You are better than all of them put together. They are common as dirt. You, dear Will... you are unique."

Belatedly Will felt the pieces clicking into place. The swirl of emotions and revelations settled, like shimmering flakes in the snow globe of his mind. This had never been a game for Hannibal; if it were, then it was a game Will could not understand. He said that Will was unique; the unspoken addition was "...just like I am."

Hannibal Lecter. The Chesapeake Ripper.

One and the same man, *and so very lonely*.

"Why didn't you kill me?" Hannibal asked again. His voice was soft, almost tender. "It would have been so easy. You were ready to do so, in the kitchen."

Why didn't I? Why am I unarmed before him now? One shot, simple and clean. No more dead bodies missing organs. No more people killed and installed as art. Will turned the thoughts over, but he knew his answer already. He had had the thought when he took up the shard of broken plate. It now glared at him, neon-bright and painful, at the forefront of his mind. He covered his mouth reflexively and smelled the blood on his hand, tasted its copper-iron on his lips.

Hannibal waited, patient as death.

"If I die, it ends for me. That's the best outcome," whispered Will. The words fought their way past his teeth, his lips. "If you're caught... if you're caught, I won't be able to stop myself looking for you. Maybe even pretend... pretend to be manipulated into breaking you out. Hell, I might even kill Chilton for this reason. And if I killed you... You're my safe place, Hannibal. You are my paddle. My shelter. If I shoot you - if I had shot you, there would've been a second bullet, and no one would find us until the dogs had eaten our faces and Alana or Jack came calling and that would have been perfect, you and I dead together, but I can't do it."

"I don't want you dead." Hannibal's voice was sharp.

"I don't want you dead either. Or caught. But I can't let you go."

"We are at an impasse, then."

"Then show me a way out of it, Hannibal, because right now? I don't see a way out that doesn't involve me breaking or changing into something I am not."

The older man tilted his head slightly, and that inhuman look filmed over his eyes again. He stepped forward and plucked Will's phone from the top of the piano, dialed a number. "Hello? I need emergency services. There is a man injured. Bleeding badly." He gave Will's address and turned off the phone. The knife gleamed in his other hand. "I won't apologize for this."

Will swallowed. Then he nodded. "You can't, not without breaking or changing into something you are not."

Hannibal cradled his jaw, caressed his cheek again as he had earlier, and pulled Will to press close to him. As the knife sliced into Will's abdomen, Hannibal whispered, "I'd wanted to show you my past. Show you the Norman Chapel, in Palermo. The skull graven in the floor. Its timelessness, its severe beauty."

Will's body shuddered and shook as shock and agony rippled through his body. Hannibal cut across his lower belly, deep enough for blood to flow steadily out and soak into Will's pants. He lay Will on the floor, grabbed a tee shirt from a drawer to press against the cut, and placed the younger man's hands over the wound. Breathing was agonizing, sending white hot flashes of pain rocketing through every nerve, but Will clutched the shirt, forced himself to keep a pressure on it.

Hannibal kept the pressure there too, and kissed Will's brow. "My brave, brilliant, beautiful Will," he murmured, "if only you'd agreed to come away with me."

"I-I can't. I can't," Will stuttered. Tears spilled from his eyes even as his fingers clenched. "Abigail- she risked h-her life. Her life. To tell me this. And all - all the people. No."

Blackness gathered on the periphery of Will's vision. He said something - Hannibal's name, perhaps, or an apology - and felt Hannibal's lips on his bloodied mouth before he was swallowed by darkness.

Chapter End Notes

one more chapter, i think :)

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When he woke up, Will found himself the subject of ridicule, morbid curiosity, and pity.

Freddie Lounds had had a field day - she had sneaked into his home and took pictures of the bloodstains, the bullet hole, the knife, and the semen stains on his used sheets. He skipped that article to find out what Hannibal did after Will had fainted. There were lots of news articles, and Will pieced the information together, Frankenstein-style.

Hannibal Lecter had disappeared. He hadn't even waited for the paramedics to get Will. He had gone to his house in Baltimore, taken what he needed from it, and then withdrew a large sum from his bank account. The last time anyone heard from him was Alana, with a message asking her to take care of Will's dogs.

Will turned the world off after that. He paid scant attention to the doctors and nurses. After the first three cards and letters, he threw every piece of mail away, unopened.

*****

*****

When Alana visited, her eyes were puffy and red-rimmed.

Will allowed her to take his uninjured hand. He said, "Crying?"

"Mostly yelling. In my car." She squeezed his fingers. "I recommended him. I can't... I recognize the fact that he did all this to you, but I've known him for years as... as a friend and a mentor and it's all so *wrong* now..."

"Not your fault," said Will. "Don't blame yourself."

"I told you to go for it."

"You weren't in possession of all the facts," Will said, "and he had everyone fooled." He paused, feeling the weight of his words on his chest. "We were all fools."

Alana exhaled, shaky and lost. They held hands until Will sank back into sleep. The last thing he remembered was the strength of her cold fingers in his hand, and that he wished he was holding the hand of another.

*****

Jack Crawford was brimming with a sense of purpose when he finally showed up, two weeks after Will had been admitted.

"We've been through his house," the burly man said. "We found out what he did with his trophies."

Will blinked, slow and dull. He had figured it out when he woke up the second time, and even now he was anticipating nausea, a complete purging of what he had dined on. Of *whom* he had dined on, at Hannibal's table. He had to crack a small smile. "Hannibal the Cannibal."

"Chilton already copyrighted that," said Jack.

"Fuck Chilton."

Jack studied Will steadily. Finally he said, "I'm sorry I put you in his way."

"Not your fault." Will breathed in, slow and painfully.

"Where do you think he'd go?" Jack asked, still in that careful, even tone.

He had been expecting that question. Will exhaled. He stared at a faint blotch in the ceiling and said, his voice hoarse and tight, "I don't know. I don't want to know. I don't want to know anything about him ever again."

Jack stood closer, his form looming over the bed. "We'll need your eyes on this, Will. You know him better than anyone else."

"Then I quit."

That was possibly the last thing Jack expected. He frowned, heavy and forbidding. "Will..."

"I quit, Jack. I resign. I'm done." Will placed his bandaged hand over his bandaged abdomen. "Hannibal Lecter is out of my life. I want that to remain the case."

"You can't quit, you're the best at what you do."

"I can," said Will pointedly. "It was not good for me, it isn't good for me, and it won't ever be good for me. I'm done. I'm done burning myself to save lives, Jack." He smiled tiredly, humorlessly. "Besides, my credibility has suffered too much from this. The FBI's best profiler, sleeping with the Chesapeake Ripper. Everything I say.... every thing I say and do, will be tainted. They will forever use that against my judgment. No, Jack. My path in law enforcement has come to a dead end. Let it die. Let me go."

He did not know if he had swayed Jack, but he knew there was nothing Jack could do about it. He knew Jack would send Beverly, Alana, anyone he could think of to persuade Will to stay.

It was all fine.

He knew he was leaving the FBI for good, even the teaching, and there would be people who would be glad to see him go.

*****

"You're leaving," said Freddie Lounds, leaning on her vehicle when Will finally returned home. "Is it because you are going after him?"

Will spared her the most cursory glare. "Get off my property, Freddie."

"He spared your life. Surely he must feel something for you," she continued. "Do you know where he is?"

"Do you?" He looked into her eyes. "Wherever he is, Freddie, he is still an avid reader of your brand of journalism. You still have one loyal fan of your work, don't worry."

He slammed the door in her face.

*****

I did not live until I kissed you, and now I merely exist in a purgatory of my own making.

The message came from an unidentified number, and when Will called back, the line was already dead.

*****

Once he had cleaned his house, Will called a realtor.

The dogs he gave to Mrs Henderson. All he packed were some clothes and a few personal possessions. Everything else he left to the new owners to decide what to keep or discard. He had hugged and petted every one of his dogs. That very final night with them, he had curled up with all seven on his bed, and cried silently after Buster had whined and licked his nose.

"He's everywhere and nowhere," he confided in his pack. He let the tears roll down his cheeks, drip onto his pillow. "He's in this house, he's in my work, he's everywhere. I can't even *breathe* without thinking of him. I'm sorry. I have to."

*****

He stayed at Brian Zeller's in the interim. He had intended to rent a crappy motel room but Beverly made the decision to offer Brian's spare room to Will, and neither man wanted to upset her. Will kept the house clean and kept out of the way, which suited Brian just fine.

"You're moving out of state?" Jimmy Price asked one night when he and Beverly came over to Brian's for dinner. He made a sound of understanding when Will nodded. "It's that bad, huh."

It was easier talking about Hannibal to them, since they were not friends with Hannibal. Will sighed. "I see him everywhere. Sometimes I hear my thoughts spoken in his voice."

"Breakups are nasty, and yours was really nasty," said Brian. He placed a plate of stir-fried vegetables on the table.

Beverly patted Will on the shoulder. "You'll keep in contact though? I'm not asking for weekly phone calls, but an email now and then would be good."

"Where are you moving to?"

"I haven't decided," said Will. "Thought I'd drive around the country a bit, then settle down where it's quiet. I don't want to have to deal with people ever again."

Jimmy wrinkled his nose. "Ugh. I can't live outside the city. Give me the nightlife, the bad traffic, the noisy neighbors." They - not Will, he listened - started talking about moving houses and ideal house sizes and types. In that moment, Will felt thankful for his colleagues for supplying that little bit of normalcy.

"In the end," said Beverly, rising to her feet for more beer, "it all boils down to what feels like home."

Toasting to that, Will ignored the feel of a phantom hand laid over his heart, the sensation of a warm body behind him.

I did not live until I kissed you.

*****

Nine months after Hannibal had stabbed him, Will found himself in a Norman chapel in Palermo. For three hours he sat in a pew and stared at the painted arches, the simple and serene beauty of the building, and contemplated death and rebirth.

He did this for a week, and then the priest came to him with an envelope.

"Signor Graham?" the priest asked. "I have a postcard for you from a Doctor Fell. He apologized that he could not meet you here."

Will took the postcard. It was a tacky postcard of the Eiffel Tower, available for one Euro at all famous tourist attractions. "Thank you."

'Dear Signor Graham,

Other matters have kept me from meeting you at Palermo. If you prefer, please come to my home instead.

Doctor Roman H. Fell.'

There was an address. Will stared at it until he had it memorized, and then, when he had left the church, burned it to ashes.

*****

*****

The house was in a small village. Not so far from the town center, but still an hour's drive through somewhat uneven roads. The forests were still richly green; there was some time to go before the golds and reds of fall set in. It would be beautiful to live here.

The house itself was an unassumingly plain cottage, with brightly-colored windows and a deep blue roof. There were no other houses around that Will could see. There were flower beds in front of the house, and raised planters with mesh nets to keep out the bugs on the side. Lots of trees in the back, and a huge field that sloped down. Towards a creek, perhaps. Ivy crept up the white walls.

Taking hold of the simple brass knocker, Will knocked hesitantly on the painted green door. He had thought of words to say. He had a whole speech prepared, about how Hannibal mustn't indulge in his other craft any more, that if Hannibal was going to eat another person, he had to start with Will Graham. A speech that said Will was not going to leave Hannibal from now on, that he was volunteering as a cage for the beast that was the Chesapeake Ripper.

The door opened.

Hannibal gazed at Will, strange and fierce and full of yearning. He cupped Will's face again, thumb brushing over the younger man's cheek. He looked much the same, except his hair fell over his brow more naturally, and he was not in a three-piece suit.

Leaning into the caress, Will stepped inside, kissed Hannibal, and shut the door.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for following this fic! Shall be taking a break for a bit :)

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!